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SERMONS

CONTAINING

A VIEW OF

CHRISTIANITY

AND

MAHOMETANISM,

IN THEIR HISTORY, THEIR EVIDENCE,
AND THEIR EFFECTS.

Presented to the Literary Society from
By Dr Layton 1817

SERMONS

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

In the Year 1784,

AT THE

110886.

LECTURE

Founded by the Rev. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A. late Canon of Salisbury.

THE SECOND EDITION.

TO WHICH IS NOW ADDED,

A SERMON

Preached before the University of Oxford, July 4, 1784,

On the Duty of attempting the Propagation of the Gospel among our Mahometan and Gentoo Subjects in India.

BY JOSEPH WHITE, B. D.
FELLOW OF WADHAM COLLEGE,
ARCHBISHOP LAUD'S PROFESSOR OF ARABIC, AND
ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S PREACHERS AT WHITEHALL.

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TO HIS GRACE

JOHN MOORE, D. D.

LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY;

BY WHOSE ADVICE THE AUTHOR

ORIGINALLY COMMENCED

HIS ORIENTAL STUDIES;

AND UNDER WHOSE PATRONAGE

HE HATH CONTINUED TO PURSUE THEM,

THIS EDITION OF A WORK,

THE RESULT OF THOSE STUDIES,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY HIS GRACE'S

MOST OBLIGED AND GRATEFUL SERVANT,

J. WHITE.

Extract from the laſt Will and Teſtament of the late Rev. JOHN BAMPTON, *Canon of* Saliſbury.

——" I give and bequeath my Lands and " Eſtates to the Chancellor, Maſters and Scho- " lars of the Univerſity of Oxford for ever, to " have and to hold all and ſingular the ſaid " Lands or Eſtates upon truſt and to the in- " tents and purpoſes hereinafter mentioned; that " that is to ſay, I will and appoint, that the Vice- " Chancellor of the Univerſity of Oxford for the " time being ſhall take and receive all the rents, " iſſues, and profits thereof, and (after all taxes, " reparations, and neceſſary deductions made) " that he pay all the remainder to the endowment " of eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be eſtab- " liſhed for ever in the ſaid Univerſity, and to " be performed in the manner following.

" I direct and appoint, that upon the firſt " Tueſday in Laſter Term, a Lecturer be yearly " choſen by the Heads of Colleges only, and " by no others, in the room adjoining to the " Printing Houſe, between the hours of ten in " the morning and two in the afternoon, to " preach eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the " year following, at St. Mary's in Oxford, be- " tween the commencement of the laſt month " in Lent Term, and the end of the third week " in Act Term.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that the eight " Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be preached " upon either of the following ſubjects—to con- " firm and eſtabliſh the Chriſtian Faith, and to

" confute

" confute all heretics and ſchiſmatics—upon the
divine authority of the Holy Scriptures—
" upon the authority of the writings of the pri-
" mitive Fathers, as to the faith and practice
" of the primitive Church—upon the Divinity
" of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt—upon
" the Divinity of the Holy Ghoſt—upon the
" Articles of the Chriſtian Faith, as compre-
" hended in the Apoſtles' and Nicene Creeds.

" Alſo I direct that thirty copies of the eight
" Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be always
" printed, within two months after they are
" preached, and one copy ſhall be given to the
" pre[illegible]cellor of the Univerſity, and one copy
" Chan[illegible] head of every College, and one copy
" to the [illegible]ayor of the city of Oxford, and one
" to the M[illegible] put into the Bodleian Library; and
" copy to be [illegible] of printing them ſhall be paid
" the expence [illegible]venue of the Lands or Eſtates
" out of the re[illegible]liſhing the Divinity Lecture
" given for eſtab[illegible] Preacher ſhall not be paid,
" Sermons; and th[illegible]e revenue before they are
" nor be entitled to th[illegible]
" printed.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, th[illegible] no perſon
" ſhall be qualified to preach the D[illegible]nity Lec-
" ture Sermons, unleſs he hath tak[illegible] the De-
" gree of Maſter of Arts at leaſt, in [illegible] of the
" two Univerſities of Oxford or Ca[illegible]idge;
" and that the ſame perſon ſhall neve[illegible] each
" the Divinity Lecture Sermons twice."

SERMON

MATT. XI. 19.

Wiſdom is juſtified of her Children.

THE chapter in which theſe words occur, opens with a conciſe relation of the Baptiſt's meſſage to our Saviour; which he ſent, probably, not ſo much to confirm his own conviction, as to gratify the pious curioſity, and to remove the modeſt ſcruples of his followers. Then follow the atteſtation which our Lord bore to the character of John, and his reflections on the treatment each of them received from a race of men, whoſe jealouſy made them ſuſpect, and whoſe perverſeneſs diſpoſed them to counteract, the wiſeſt methods that divine wiſdom had adopted for their reformation. A temper

A of

of mind ſo deſtitute of candour, ſo incapable of ſolid improvement, ſo pre-determined to reſiſt the moſt ſalutary counſels of heaven, was elegantly compared to that wayward folly which is ſometimes obſervable in children, whoſe obſtinacy no corrections can controul, and whoſe fondneſs no condeſcenſions can engage. If you pipe to them they are too ſullen to dance; and if you mourn to them, they are too gay to lament. The compariſon, though mortifying, was deſerved: and that it might not loſe its aim, our Lord made a particular application of it to the Jews. He informed them, without a figure, that they were the perverſe children whom he had more immediately in view; and that it was their infatuated perverſeneſs, which the compariſon was deſigned to illuſtrate and expoſe: for ſuch contrary appearances did it aſſume, that neither the exemplary auſterity of John, nor the more gracious familiarity of Chriſt himſelf, could either conquer its diſlike

or conciliate its eſteem. Did John lead an abſtemious life, and ſequeſter himſelf from the cares and amuſements of the world, as if purſuing a courſe which ſeemed moſt favourable to the ſolemnity of his office, and which, as it removed him at a diſtance from temptation, was likely to ſhelter his character from the petulance of ridicule, and the malignity of reproach? With what eyes did the Jews behold his conduct, and what interpretation did they put upon it? By ſuppoſing that he was under dæmoniacal influence, they thought ſuch unreaſonable and unnatural ſeverity could be eaſily accounted for. They gazed, perhaps, ſome with ſtupid admiration, and ſome even with ſcornful contempt, at the rigour of the hermit; but turned a deaf ear to the warnings of the preacher.

Did our bleſſed Lord adopt a mode of behaviour in ſome reſpects different from the very auſtere habits of the Baptiſt's life?

Did he poſſeſs more of the ſocial qualities of human nature? Was he more eaſy of acceſs, and did he with leſs appearance of reſtraint converſe with mankind? What effect had his amiable and condeſcending manners on the very people, who had been offended at the ſtrict ſelf-denial which his meſſenger had voluntarily impoſed on himſelf? Were their prejudices vanquiſhed? Was their good opinion conciliated? No. On the contrary, their perverſe humour was always predominant, when their reformation was the object of the preacher: and in order to evade the end, they vilified the means. Thus they traduced our bleſſed Lord *as a glutton and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and ſinners.*

After theſe reflections on the inconſiſtence of their judgement, and the ſtubbornneſs of their diſpoſitions, particularly as diſcovered againſt himſelf, and the religion which he came to eſtabliſh, he adds,

adds, *But wiſdom is juſtified of her children*. As if he had ſaid, "Though the generation to which I am ſent to diſcloſe the firſt [illegible] of grace, is ſo eager to miſinterpret my doctrines, and to cenſure my conduct; yet there are thoſe who will readily bear their teſtimony in my favour, from evidence too clear to be contradicted with effect, or even to be doubted with propriety. The children of wiſdom are placed in a ſituation the moſt auſpicious to conviction: and if in proportion to their knowledge of its evidence, be their zeal in its ſupport, and their concern for its intereſts; they will juſtify it by their teſtimony to future generations, againſt the cavils of the unbelieving, and amidſt the perſecutions of the cruel."

By the term *wiſdom* in the text our bleſſed Lord meant, as ſome ſuppoſe, HIMSELF; who is in the higheſt ſenſe deſerving of the appellation, as being the WORD AND WISDOM of God, in whom *are hidden*

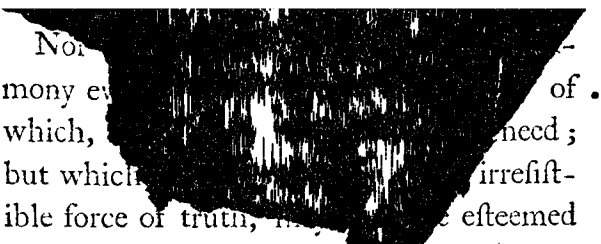
all the treaſures of knowledge; and who is *the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

Others are of opinion, that the expreſſion was meant to convey a ſublime idea of the character of his goſpel: which is in truth the illuſtration of divine wiſdom, and contains the ſyſtem of that knowledge, which can alone *make us wiſe unto ſalvation.*

A goſpel ſo divine in its original, ſo excellent in its deſign, and ſo beneficial in its effects, appeared *worthy of all acceptation* to many impartial enquirers, whoſe conduct brought no diſcredit on the cauſe they ſtood forward to defend. The children of wiſdom have, indeed, frequently juſtified it by arguments too ſtrong for its enemies to confute: and thouſands in the pains of death, and amidſt the tortures of crucifixion, inſtead of falling from the faith, have adhered to it with firmer hopes,

ſt[illegible]ic, and the [illegible] Other examp[illegible]ſe convince. [illegible]may edify and warm [illegible]; may excite our emulation, and r[illegible]e up the languiſhing ſpirit of devotion. But the trials of ancient times produced examples at once ſo inſtructive and ſo ſplendid, that while the heart is affected, the conſcience alſo is enlightened. We are not carried away with ſympathetic impulſes, which have no foundation but in the wild dreams of fanaticiſm, or the tumultuous emotions of enthuſiaſm. No. The underſtanding takes a ſhare in the impreſſion: we approve while we wonder; and our reaſon is as much convinced by the evidence of truth, as our paſſions are captivated by the power of what is ſingular and extraordinary.

When

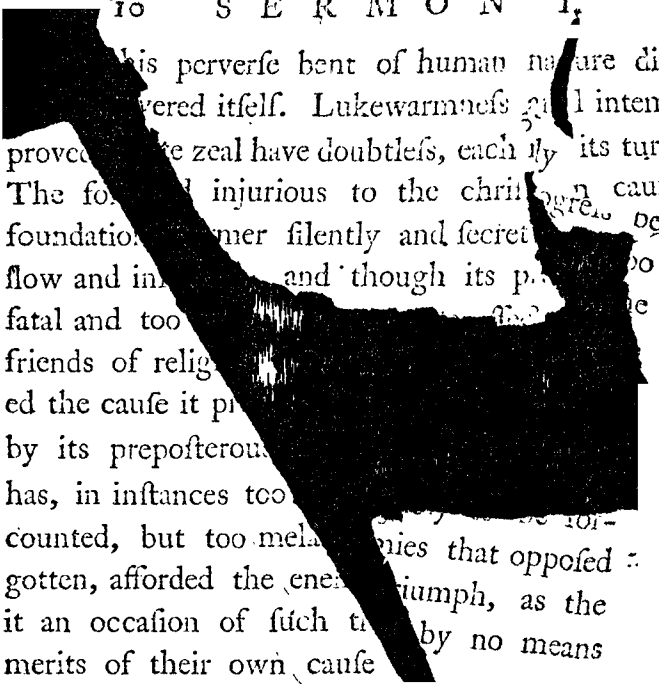


Nor [illegible] mony ev[illegible] of which, [illegible] need; but which [illegible] irresistible force of truth, [illegible] esteemed as a confirmation of its ge[illegible]al evidence: since they whose wish and whose interest it was to decry it, yet were compelled, if not to receive it wholly, yet to acknowledge it in part; and thus, like Pilate, they pronounced him *righteous*, whom they condemned; and, like Judas, confessed him *innocent*, whom they betrayed.

Though God, according to his promise, has always *had a seed to serve him*, which might be *accounted as his peculiar generation*; men who have considered the success of religion as intimately connected with their own well-being, and who have

When we review the times in wh[illegible] such gre[illegible]t examples occur, we are [illegible] to make [illegible]omparisons that are by no m[illegible] flat[illegible]ing [illegible]o ourselves, and those [illegible] whom we [illegible] live. The character[illegible] tu[illegible] re[illegible] the present age [illegible] to l[illegible] god- [illegible]ve then [illegible]should be [illegible] the pretence [illegible]n mind from [illegible]n, the common offices of devo[illegible] [illegible]ave been decried. From the affect[illegible] of candour we have sunk into listl[illegible]s; and have tamely suffered a dar[illegible] spirit of infidelity to oppose, and [illegible]ec[illegible]us heresy to undermine the inter[illegible] of christianity; because we have b[illegible] apprehensive that our firmness would [illegible]e stigmatized with the odious nam[illegible] of bigotry!

It has indeed been always the unhappy [illegible]ate of mankind to run into extremes: and in matters of religion more especially has this



his perverſe bent of human nature diſ-
vered itſelf. Lukewarmneſs and intem-
proved zeal have doubtleſs, each in its turn,
The ſo injurious to the chriſtian cauſe
foundatio mer ſilently and ſecret
flow and in and though its p
fatal and too
friends of relig
ed the cauſe it p
by its prepoſterou
has, in inſtances too
counted, but too mel nies that oppoſed
gotten, afforded the ene iumph, as the
it an occaſion of ſuch t by no means
merits of their own cauſe
entitled them to claim.

The children of wiſdom, wh e they
feel their better hopes ſecured by its pro-
miſes, cannot grow indifferent to its in-
tereſts; nor look on the inſults which are
from time to time offered to its moſt ſa-
cred and awful obligations, with the cold-
neſs of unconcerned ſpectators. They can-
not

not see its holy inſtitutions ſlighted, or its eſſential doctrines blaſphemed, without lamenting that almoſt unparalleled and portentous degeneracy of mind and manners which is the real ſource of all we lament, and of all which we wiſh to correct. They cannot but tremble at the probable, I will not ſay approaching, iſſue of ſuch ingratitude to heaven for its *unſpeakable gift*.

But the wiſdom which they are taught to value, they know at the ſame time how to defend. The ſpirit which it inſpires, is *firſt pure, and then peaceable, gentle, full of good fruits, eaſy to be entreated, without partiality, and without hypocriſy*. The children of wiſdom are therefore conſiſtent as well as ſincere: their candour does not make them lukewarm, nor their zeal uncharitable.

The Epicureans of antiquity, and the infidels of our own days, arrogantly boaſt of their high atchievements in ſnapping aſunder

aſunder the chains of ſuperſtition: and in the execution of their deſperate purpoſe they go forward with unſhaken fortitude, and unremitted alacrity. Muſt we then grow ſupine and inactive, when the danger is more imminent and more threatning? Muſt we affect the petty popularity, which ariſe from flattering the prejudices of men, inſtead of aſpiring to the glory of ſaving their ſouls? Far be ſuch compliance from the children of wiſdom.

But the ſincere and well-informed advocates of the gospel, while engaged in the juſtification of its principles, and the ſupport of its intereſts, are at the ſame time careful not to laviſh their activity on ſubjects of remote effect, or barren curioſity. Wiſdom reſerves its vigour for exertions worthy of its own noble aims: and if it be *zealouſly affected*, it is *always a good thing*. Actuated by ſuch motives, and placed in ſuch circumſtances, it not only defies all the arts of calumny, but chal-

challenges ſome tribute of praiſe. The everlaſting truths of the goſpel, with which the welfare of mankind is moſt nearly connected, demand our ſerious regards, and juſtify the warmeſt efforts of zeal, at once directed by knowledge, and tempered by philanthropy.

There are errors that would bereave us of every hope which points to immortality, looſen the beſt cement of ſociety, and overturn the very conſtitution of religion both natural and revealed. Oppoſition to ſuch errors deſerves not the odious epithets of bigotry and ſuperſtition. Infidelity, we know, has its zealots; and hereſies of the moſt malignant tendency have their advocates; advocates, I mean, who ſcorn accommodation with what they are pleaſed to call the inventions of prieſtcraft, and the prejudices of the vulgar; who make a triumphant boaſt of the freedom with which they oppoſe the peculiar and diſtinguiſhing doctrines of chriſtianity; who are neither aſhamed, nor afraid to de-

clare openly to the world, that as they have hitherto exerted themſelves, ſo will they continue to exert themſelves in demoliſhing the fortreſſes of orthodoxy. Theſe hardy and heroic champions of reformation diſdain to pay any reverence to the ruſt of antiquity—they are no reſpecters of the authority attached to names—they ſcorn to ſacrifice any precarious opinion about the purity of truth, to the eſtabliſhed peace of the world. The collective wiſdom and exemplary piety of preceding generations, are to the philoſopher a ſtumbling block, and to the innovator fooliſhneſs.

In repreſſing the violence, and in expoſing the abſurdities of ſuch writers, we may peract a part which prejudiced men may perhaps impute to unworthy motives. But why then are we blamed for doing to others, what others, if they ſuppoſed us to lie under any dangerous deluſion, would make a merit of doing to us? Is that officious in the children of wiſdom, which in their ad-

adverſaries is benevolent? is their firmneſs our obſtinacy? Their cauſe ſurely has no preſumptive proof of ſuperiority. Their abilities are not of a greater ſize. Their activity is not directed to nobler ends.

They laugh indeed at our blindneſs, and they rail at our ardour: but to hear the rude clamours of thoſe who aſſault chriſtianity, or of thoſe who betray it, without emotion and without reſiſtance, would imply a tameneſs of ſpirit, which our enemies would be the firſt to inſult and to ridicule. By ſilent forbearance, or languid oppoſition, we ſhould indeed give too much colour to an inſinuation lately thrown out by one who has ruſhed foremoſt in the ranks, and ſounded with a louder blaſt than his fellows the horn of battle, that we *are at eaſe in Zion*, only becauſe we are grown indifferent to her better intereſts.

There are indeed too many perſons, from whom a more conſiſtent conduct might

have

have been expected, who are active in the profecution of thoſe temporal privileges, which are connected with their ſpiritual function, and who eagerly pant for honours and diſtinctions; yet are too little concerned to promote the honour of the goſpel, and quite indifferent about the preſervation of thoſe glorious truths, which render it at once the admiration and delight of rational, but guilty and fallen creatures.

But it is unfair to argue from particulars to univerſals; and ungenerous to cenſure the whole for the defects or errors of a few. Many there are, whoſe conduct ſtill tends to reſcue their profeſſion from the diſgrace which malice is eager to throw on it. Wiſdom can yet boaſt of children, whoſe mingled zeal and prudence do not diſgrace the cauſe they have the honour to ſupport. Hence their zeal for God never contradicts their charity to men. While it oppoſes principles which are injurious to the intereſts of truth,

and

and deſtructive to the ſouls of men, yet it diminiſhes not the ſincereſt regard for the perſons of thoſe, by whom ſuch principles are adopted. It loves the man, it eſteems the ſcholar, it applauds the believer, even while it faithfully chaſtens his guilt, or freely admoniſhes him of his error.

There is ſome difficulty, doubtleſs, in fixing by precept the boundaries of that zeal, with which chriſtians in general, and the miniſters of the goſpel in particular, ought to be inſpired: but example will at once unfold the principle of zeal as a quality, and enforce the obligation of it as a duty. In the conduct of St. Paul we ſee this virtue well illuſtrated; and we may moſt becomingly, and moſt profitably, contemplate it as a model of imitation.

The principal object this illuſtrious child of wiſdom had in view, was the glory of God: and this he was convinced, could

only be properly and effectually promoted by ſteadineſs and prudence in maintaining the great truths of the goſpel. To an object ſo momentous, he ſacrificed all that the world call dear; his eaſe, his intereſt, his reputation, yea even life itſelf. No fundamental doctrines did he obſcure by partial ſuppreſſion, or refine away by ſophiſtical interpretation: he taught them, as he received them from above. He ſcorned to temporize, when his commiſſion was clear, and the object of high and indubitable importance. In matters of little conſequence he acted with diſcretion; but it was a diſcretion, which the ſtricteſt integrity warranted, which the frailties, or the prepoſſeſſions of his hearers required, nay, which the higher intereſts of the church itſelf loudly and unequivocally demanded.

We have a very animated deſcription of his noble and honeſt zeal in the neceſſary oppoſition which he made to the falſe teachers, who had inſidiouſly endeavoured,

voured, by hypocritical ſhews of a purer and more ancient doctrine, to corrupt and pervert the Galatian church. *Falſe brethren*, ſays he, *unawares brought in, who came privily to ſpy out our liberty which we have in Chriſt Jeſus, that they might bring us into bondage to whom we gave place by ſubjection, no not for an hour; that the truth of the goſpel might continue with you*[a]. Thus the apoſtle exemplified his own poſition—*that he could do nothing againſt the truth*—either negatively, or poſitively; either by oppoſing it himſelf, or by tamely acquieſcing in the oppoſition of its enemies.

All truths are not of equal moment, or ſupported by evidence equally clear: in matters of a doubtful nature, conceſſion therefore is ultimately of more advantage to the intereſts of truth, than contention. We ſhould, however, be careful what points we aſſign to the claſs of dubious and unimportant controverſy.

[a] Gal. ii. 4, 5.

They who call upon us to conclude, are, indeed, more clear in pointing out where conceſſion is to begin, than where it is to end. If we muſt recede from well-founded and long eſtabliſhed opinions by way of accommodation, why not give way in ſome points of practice which have been rendered familiar by cuſtom, and which bear on them the venerable ſtamp of ancient preſcription. If loud complaints and bitter accuſations could evince the neceſſity of a reform, the church of England is not only ignorant of the peculiar doctrines which diſtinguiſh Chriſtianity, but groſly defective in the diſcharge even of its moral duties. Thus ſome have told us, that we ſhall never convert the unbeliever till we indiſcriminately and avowedly abandon thoſe doctrines which are called myſterious: and of late one daring adventurer in the field of reformation, has thrown aſide the common reſtraints of modeſty, and with an effrontery equally ſingular and inſulting, has informed the chriſtian world,

that there is no proſpect of converting the Mahometans, unleſs they have a ſanction from the church to continue in the practice of polygamy [b].

Amidſt the claimants to the privileges of truth, who are to be gratified? Amidſt the various projectors of reformation, whoſe plans are to be adopted? Many ſet up pretenſions to excluſive preference: all aſſert their right of being coolly and impartially heard. Let therefore all be heard: though in the maſs of human opinions, and amidſt the conflict of human paſſions, all cannot be ſatisfied.

There is a ſpirit which ſeems to be always diſcontented, till its wildeſt claims are allowed; and which having been turbulent under injudicious reſtraint, becomes tyrannical when in poſſeſſion of uſurped authority.

But let not the freedom of enquiry be ſhackled. For if it multiplies conten-

[b] Thelyphthora, vol. ii. p. 85, &c.

tions among the wiſe and virtuous, it exerciſes the charity of thoſe who contend. If it ſhakes, for a time, the belief which is reſted only upon prejudice, it finally ſettles it on the broader and more ſolid baſis of conviction.

Truth aſſuredly has nothing to fear from the oppoſition of its enemies: and the children of wiſdom are not to be ſeduced from their perſuaſion of its excellence, by the ſubtlety of the ſophiſt, or the calumnies of the ſcoffer. They know that its origin is from above; and that an almighty arm protects and ſecures it. They do indeed deplore that malignity of heart, and that blindneſs of underſtanding, which too frequently appear in the deſigns of its various adverſaries, either to pervert its principles, or to obſtruct its genuine influence: yet they have too much reſpect for their cauſe, to diſgrace it by the baſe and unnatural aid of perſecution; and they have too much confidence in their own ſtrength, to ſhrink from a conteſt in which

which the triumphs of error are precarious and tranſitory.

They are convinced that the weapons of the chriſtian warfare *are not carnal, but ſpiritual*; and that our religion, though protected by human power againſt violence and outrage, for the ſake of preſerving its members in peace, yet is to make its way in the world only by the force of evidence; and to keep its ground as well by the moderation, as by the abilities of its advocates.

Conſcious of the difficulties in which the moral governor of the univerſe ſeems to have left many intereſting topics, reflecting on the different degrees of vigour which belong to different underſtandings, and ſenſible of the various lights in which the ſame queſtion preſents itſelf in various circumſtances, the friend of truth is more ready to enquire than to dogmatize, and to inform than to condemn. There is an oppoſition which he conſiders as of a more

enlightened and liberal kind; which is conducted with temper and decency; which has not for its object thoſe licentious and immoral views which have been juſtly charged upon the more popular ſyſtems of infidelity; and which, inſtead of proving injurious to the great cauſe it attacks, will be eventually the means of confirming its authority, and of illuſtrating its principles.

Such oppoſition excites a keener attention not only among the adverſaries, but the friends of the goſpel. It brings forward into open day thoſe evidences, which are dimly and indiſtinctly perceived by both. It clears them from every uſeleſs incumbrance, which tends to obſcure their luſtre. It confirms and ſanctifies the faith of the chriſtian; it humbles the arrogance, where it cannot overcome the preposſeſſions, of the infidel: the inquiſitive are inſtructed; and the impartial are completely and unalterably convinced.

Among

Among the teachers of the chriſtian religion, it is unqueſtionably a duty, to ſtudy its evidences with ſuch care, and to examine its principles with ſuch integrity, *as to be able always to give a reaſon of the hope that is in them.* But there are other obligations alſo attending the clerical profeſſion, of more immediate concern, than the mere office of repelling hoſtile objections, or even of removing the ſincere, but painful ſcruples of our neighbour.

From the natural modeſty of their diſpoſitions, or perhaps from the want of opportunity to collect materials for the purpoſes of publications, many excellent men are contented with retaining their own faith in ſilence and obſcurity; and with diffuſing the ſaving truths of the goſpel only among thoſe who are committed to their charge.

There is therefore a ſingular propriety in inſtitutions of this kind: and it cannot be denied, that in conſequence of them

them much has been added to the general ſtock of learning, and ſtill more to the elucidation of the particular evidences of natural and revealed religion. Men of extenſive knowledge and ſolid judgment have by theſe means been called forth to public view, at a time when raillery might have diſcouraged the modeſt; and when the moſt ſanguine might have deſpaired of victory, from the number rather than the talents, of thoſe who were leagued together in the ſupport of impiety. They have been rouzed by the call of pious and munificent patrons, to ſtand forth as the champions of truth, virtue, and religion. Their abilities have excited the general veneration of the world: their candour has extorted praiſe even from their hardieſt antagoniſts: and by their ſucceſs in explaining and defending the doctrines of revelation, the wiſdom of the founders has been amply juſtified, and their generoſity abundantly recompenſed by that which they would have themſelves eſteemed the nobleſt of all rewards,

wards, the fair and final eſtabliſhment of evangelical truth.

Thus the abſurdity of atheiſm has been expoſed; and the atheiſt driven from the field he had the preſumption to call his own, even by the very weapons which he choſe for his defence. Deiſm in all its forms has been examined and detected: all its illiberal cavils have been replied to; all its haughty pretenſions confounded; and even the pertinent and momentous objections, to which the beſt informed, and beſt diſpoſed of its advocates ſometimes had recourſe, have been weighed with impartiality, and refuted by argument.

Thoſe tenets, which raſh and ſuperficial enquirers had ſuppoſed to be deſtitute of foundation, have been expreſſed with greater preciſion, ſupported by ſtronger proofs, and recommended by new illuſtrations.

Our

Our own church, more eſpecially has aſſerted with juſt and growing confidence her ſuperiority over all other eſtabliſhments. She has been enabled to reſiſt the unkind and unfair aſſaults that have been made againſt her doctrines. She has ſeen in her friends a conſtant increaſe of that ſound knowledge, which ever draws onward in its train an increaſe of good morals.

The children of wiſdom thus going on from ſtrength to ſtrength, are not to be deterred from the proſecution of their reſearches, or the avowal of their ſentiments, by illiberal inſinuation, or audacious invective. *While they ſearch all things, they hold faſt that which is good.* They are not diſmayed by groundleſs and vulgar imputations of indulging a ſpirit of real bigotry, and of contending for the credit of imaginary orthodoxy. Their talk is arduous; their intentions are honourable; and in every conteſt where they have hitherto

therto been oppoſed, they may juſtly boaſt of having been more than conquerors in the day of trial.

Objections which, from their minuteneſs, might otherwiſe have been neglected, have now received the moſt ſatisfactory anſwers: and doubts, which from their obſcurity, or from the modeſty of thoſe in whoſe minds they aroſe, might have remained unreſolved, have been openly examined, and fairly removed. In ſhort, every part of the great fabric of religion, has received ſome diſtinct ſupport or illuſtration, which has added to the ſtrength and beauty of the whole ſyſtem.

But theſe inſtitutions, ſalutary as they may have been to the cauſe of chriſtianity, and propitious to the intereſts of ſcience, have not been totally exempt from objection.

As every ſubject of human ſpeculation is bounded by ſome limits, additional proofs,

proofs, and even additional illuſtrations, cannot always be expected: and inſtitutions which require the unremitted attention of the mind, and the application of learning and argument to the ſame ſubjects, may be ſuſpected rather of adding to the quantity, than to the real uſes of ſpeculation; and of promoting more an anxiety for novel opinions than a ſerious concern for eſtabliſhed truths. Though the earlier periods of theſe inſtitutions, therefore, have been diſtinguiſhed by a more than ordinary diſplay of erudition, and their utility is become as conſpicuous as the abilities which ſupported them; yet genius itſelf will languiſh, when confined to one track, nor will learning be able to recruit its vigour, when it finds that its ſtores have been made common to others. In this caſe we have much to apprehend from the indolent, and, perhaps, ſtill more from the vain. With the former the cauſe will be weakened by dulneſs and inſipidity; with the latter it will be perverted

verted by the luſt of novelty. The indolent deſpairing of making any valuable addition to the proofs, or general illuſtrations of religion, will content themſelves with the ſame track that others have purſued, and be ſatisfied with the negative merit of ſaying nothing amiſs. The vain will have recourſe to fancy, to ſupply the want of more ſolid matter; and will give ſcope to airy ſpeculation, in order to have the credit of advancing ſomething ſingular.

It cannot therefore be expected that on the ſame ſubjects of diſcuſſion, and thoſe ſubjects circumſcribed by very narrow limits, the progreſs ſhould be as ſplendid as the commencement: and to thoſe who are adverſe, or even indifferent to the cauſe of religion, it may afford ſome little matter of triumph, or ſome ſlight ground for ſceptical inſinuation, that on ſubjects of ſuch unequalled moment, ſo little of what is captivating by the mere charms of novelty, is produced by the moſt com-

prehenſive

prehenſive reſearch, and the moſt elaborate explanation.

The objection, however, is of no weight, when duly conſidered. Religion is, like its author, unchangeable. The reaſons which ſupport it are as old as itſelf: and though its proofs may be ſet in a new light, yet the proofs themſelves cannot be new. To the word of God it were preſumption to add; it is our duty to take nothing from it; and in theſe circumſtances whatever doctrine profeſſes to be at once eſſential to be known, and yet hitherto unknown, may in conſequence of ſuch profeſſion, be ſuſpected of dangerous miſtake.

But the wiſdom of our Founder has been as conſpicuous as his liberality. The plan which he has adopted, is extenſive and various; it gives ſcope to philoſophical and hiſtorical enquiry; and to thoſe who unite the love of virtue with curioſity, it will be a ſource of perpetual information

formation. The connection between ſacred and profane learning, and the conſiſtence of true religion with true philoſophy, are by repeated experiments now decided.

Whatever ſcience therefore ſhall inveſtigate, may here be purſued, as far as the cauſe of religion can receive any illuſtration from it. Polite literature may here open its nobleſt ſtores; and criticiſm apply them to the elucidation of obſcure paſſages, and to the eſtabliſhment of fundamental truths.

From the corruptions which grow out of exceſſive civilization, and from the miſchiefs which attend the improper and indiſcriminate fondneſs that pervades all ranks of men for philoſophical ſubjects, we have little reaſon to ſuppoſe that the period will ſoon arrive, in which no additional objections ſhall be brought againſt the evidence, or the doctrines of the goſpel. Here then, it is to be hoped, ſuch

anſwers will always be produced, as will be ſufficient to counteract their influence, and to expoſe their futility.

But while this inſtitution is directed to the general object of defending and eſtabliſhing the chriſtian faith; and on that account poſſeſſes, in common with other ſimilar inſtitutions which preceded it, the ſame general utility; it has alſo the ſuperior advantage of blending together whatever was peculiar and appropriate to them, and of uniting all their excellencies in itſelf.

It is indeed principally deſigned to counteract the progreſs of error in all its forms, and of infidelity under every mode of oppoſition. As ſuch, the object is of ſupreme importance, and opens an extenſive field for ſpeculation. The ſources of error are inexhauſtible: and whilſt either vanity or vice influences mankind, it will be eaſy for ſophiſtry to invent new forms of objection; while profligacy will be ever

ever diſpoſed to diſcredit the faith that condemns it. We may flatter ourſelves, however, with this hope, that as much ingenuity will be ſhewn in the defence of our faith, as can be exerted in oppoſing it; and that while the enemy is ſowing tares, the chriſtian huſbandman will not be leſs vigilant in cultivating the good ſeed.

Hitherto, indeed, infidelity has not been able to atchieve any thing which may recompence the activity, or gratify the vanity of its advocates. They have ſucceſsfully employed the arts of converſion with the churliſh miſanthrope, who would aſſimilate the character of the Deity to the dark and unamiable complexion of his own; with the raw and conceited ſtripling, who diſdains to tread in the beaten track of opinion; or with the obdurate libertine, who is intereſted in weakening the ſanctions, and diſproving the very exiſtence, of a law by which he ſtands condemned. But have the virtuous and the wiſe, have men of the higheſt rank in li-

terature, or of the moſt reſpectable reputations in ſociety, gone over to their party?

We do not envy them the paltry pittance of glory which they can acquire from the number of converts, who *love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds are evil:* but we are moſt ſincerely anxious for the ſake of other men, to reſcue them from the *baneful and ſpecious* allurements of opinions, which will either draw them aſide to vice, or prevent their return to virtue, once neglected and deſerted.

Our religion, however, is not itſelf tarniſhed by the corruptions of thoſe who wantonly abandon, or malignantly revile it. The ſame cauſe, we are aware, will always produce the ſame effect: and while the goſpel continues to inculcate a pure doctrine, it muſt expect a very unwelcome reception from the corrupt paſſions of mankind.

But while we juſtify the ways of God, we mean not to ſpeak with undiſtinguiſhing contempt, or with unrelenting aſperity, of every man by whom they have been arraigned. In ſome of thoſe who look upon the goſpel with an unfriendly eye, we readily acknowledge, and, under any other circumſtances, we ſhould warmly admire, very ſhining abilities. They have attacked our citadel by every inſtrument of violence, and with every ſtratagem of art. Our antagoniſts have ſometimes aſſailed it with declamatory eloquence, and ſometimes undermined it with the aid of metaphyſical ſubtlety: but the church of Chriſt is, we experimentally know, deeply and firmly founded on a rock; and the blaſts of oppoſition, however ſudden and however impetuous, are inſufficient to overthrow it.

Yet diſpoſed, as we are, to do juſtice to the talents of thoſe who differ from us; and compelled, as we are, to lament the ſad perverſion of them, we reſiſt with in-

dignation, the diſingenuous and haughty pretenſions which they put up to eminent ſuperiority of learning, and to peculiar liberality of ſentiment. We know, in fact, that our religion has been ſincerely believed, and ſtrenuouſly defended, by men who have aſcended the ſummit of human knowledge by the vigour of their genius, and the intenſeneſs of their application.

Locke and Malbranche do not yield the palm of metaphyſical acuteneſs to the ſullen ſophiſtry of Hobbes, or the cold ſcepticiſm of Hume. In brilliancy of imagination and delicacy of taſte, Berkeley is, ſurely, not inferior to Shaftesbury. In ſolid and maſculine ſenſe, and in erudition claſſical or philoſophical, who are the champions of infidelity that deſerve to be compared with a Taylor, a Wilkins, a Cudworth, a Barrow, a Clark, a Boyle, and a Newton?

And what, we may boldly aſk, what is there in the nature of things themſelves, that

that acuteneſs of penetration and juſtneſs of reaſoning ſhould be excluſively poſſeſſed by thoſe who deride chriſtianity, or by thoſe who corrupt it?

If great and good men yet adhere to our party, when they may, upon conviction deſert it, without danger and without infamy; a ſtrong preſumption ariſes, that the cauſe of religious wiſdom has been ably and ſucceſsfully pleaded by her children.

We have indeed ever been ready to meet our antagoniſts on any fair ground of diſputation. We are not afraid of coming to the teſt of hiſtory, and of criticiſm; of ethics, where they are ſound; and of metaphyſics, where they are intelligible. We decline the uſe of no weapons that are honourable: at the ſame time we wiſh not to be indebted for our triumphs, to the pointed ſhafts of ridicule, or to the poiſonous arts of inſinuation. But while we profeſſedly ourſelves diſdain to uſe ſuch

modes of defence, we are not terrified at the eagerneſs with which other men employ them.

There is a providence which controuls all human events, and brings good out of evil: and it is this providence which ſeems to have permitted the attacks of infidelity, in order to give greater evidence to the faith it oppoſes.

It is not neceſſary in the preſent ſituation of things, to attempt any new arrangement of proofs, or ſyſtem of evidence. It will be time enough to invent ſome freſh modes of demonſtration, when it is found that the old are incapable of affording conviction to the honeſt and impartial enquirer after truth.

The nature of evidence, however, depends in a great meaſure on the manner in which it is conſidered; and the ſame arguments and illuſtrations will appear in very different lights of ſtrength and conviction,

viction, according to our various modes of ſtudy and habits of reflection.

If therefore I preſume not, in the following diſcourſes to produce any teſtimonies unheard of, or arguments hitherto unknown, in ſupport of our faith: yet I hope I ſhall be entitled to your indulgence, if I in ſome degree deviate from the more common track of ſpeculation, and apply my attention to a ſpecies of diſcuſſion, which has, perhaps from the remoteneſs of that ſort of learning on which it depends, been handled with leſs minuteneſs of inveſtigation than its importance ſeems to demand.

It may be preſumed, that thoſe topics are beſt underſtood by us, to which we have devoted the greateſt ſhare of application. On this ground I may flatter myſelf with the hopes of your candid attention, while I am more immediately treating thoſe ſubjects, to which the courſe

of

of ſtudies purſued from my own choice, and the nature of an academical employment conferred by your kindneſs, have pointed my enquiries—*in quo tamen ego quid eniti, aut quid efficere poſſim, malo in aliorum ſpe relinquere, quam in oratione ponere mea.*[c]

The great ſcene of revelation has been the EAST. There the ſource of genuine inſpiration was firſt opened: and from thence the ſtreams of divine knowledge began to flow. It was the grand theatre, on which the Almighty governor of the world *made bare his arm, and by ſigns and wonders, and mighty deeds,* eſtabliſhed the conviction of his righteous providence and ſupreme dominion in the hearts of men. There he led the people of Iſrael like a flock, by the hand of Moſes and Aaron: there the Prophets uttered their predictions: and there the Son of God illuſtrated and fulfilled them.

[c] Cicero, Orat. in Q. Cæcilium.

But

But there alſo has the impoſtor Mahomet erected his ſtandard—that ſtandard to which thouſands have flocked, with an ardour that may well raiſe a bluſh on the countenances of too many, who pretend to fight under the banner of the croſs.

Whoſoever, therefore, has bent his attentions to the purſuits of oriental literature, and the ſtudy of eaſtern hiſtory, muſt be deeply impreſſed with this peculiar and diſtinguiſhing circumſtance of Aſiatic hiſtory: and he will unavoidably form ſome compariſons between thoſe two great ſources of religious opinion. From the climes which he reviews, have ſprung thoſe powerful ſyſtems, which have ſpread themſelves over the moſt enlightened portion of the globe; and which for ages have determined the belief, and influenced the conduct of the greateſt nations which inhabit it. Beginning equally in ſilence and obſcurity, they have advanced

to

to a dominion equally unknown in any former age: but widely different in the cauſes by which their ſucceſs has been produced, and in the principles on which their authority is founded; they call the attention of philoſophy to the inveſtigation of their hiſtory, as to the ſublimeſt object, which can intereſt the curious, or employ the profound.

Whether they be conſidered as the ſources of *religious belief*, and as thus agitating in the moſt powerful manner the hopes and fears of mankind; or as the principles which have influenced the revolutions of nations, and thus including the cauſes of the moſt memorable events in human hiſtory, they ſtand forth as the moſt brilliant ſubjects of religious and political ſpeculation, and claim the beſt exertions of philoſophical ſagacity.

Amidſt ſcenes ſo ſtriking and ſo eventful, the ſtudent of oriental literature cannot

not remain unmoved. Whatever knowledge he may have acquired, whatever judgment he may poſſeſs, muſt be uſefully laid out in comparing thoſe two great ſects which thus divide mankind, and in collecting from deep and impartial enquiry the marks of true and falſe inſpiration.

In purſuit of reſearches, ſtretched through ſo large an extent, and which embrace ſo many important objects, he will probably be led to conſider theſe two religions in their Hiſtory, their Evidence, and their Effects; as the three great ſources of compariſon, by which their truth is to be determined.

He will begin, therefore, by examining the ſituation of the world at the reſpective periods when their authors appeared: and from this inveſtigation he will with certainty infer, what can be aſſigned to the wiſdom of heaven, and what to the policy of men.

He

He will then weigh in the balance of calm and unprejudiced reaſon the evidence upon which they reſt their claims; and endeavour by theſe means to fix the criteria of real and pretended revelation.

He will cloſe his enquiries by conſidering their effects upon mankind, whether as individuals, or nations: for from the tendency of a religion to promote the preſent happineſs of men, we may determine the probability of its connection with their future intereſts. In this manner it is probable that he will be able to aſcertain the nature and character of theſe reſpective ſyſtems better than in the more inartificial method of detached and deſultory enquiry. For, doubtleſs, in proportion to the variety and magnitude of thoſe circumſtances in which either ſyſtem is ſeen to be farther removed from the wily ſtratagems a deceiver would employ, and the baſe ends he would purſue; in proportion as it approaches nearer to the idea of ſuch a religion as the divine being,

being, who acts for the beſt purpoſes by the beſt means, may be ſuppoſed to communicate to mankind; in that exact proportion will its claims be authenticated and its evidence confirmed.

It is to this great ſubject of diſcuſſion that I preſume to call the attention of the audience I now addreſs; and I do not know that it is within the compaſs of my information to bring any more uſeful or more proper offering to the truth of our faith, than the reſult of thoſe enquiries which my ſituation and profeſſion have enabled me to make. I purpoſe therefore to conſider, in their moſt important points of view, the characters of Mahometaniſm and Chriſtianity; and the nature of their reſpective pretenſions to a divine origin.

Nothing, ſurely, is ſo likely to attract the attention of ſcholars to eaſtern literature, as the ſplendid ſcene of Aſiatic hiſtory which is here preſented to them; and

and the important treaſures of religious, of political, and of philoſophical information which it contains.

We rejoice in the progreſs of every ſtudy, which connects the various materials of knowledge by new ties, diverſifies them by new combinations, and enlarges the views of the contemplative and pious believer. We feel a growing confidence in our cauſe, from the conviction, that the farther ſuch enquiries are puſued, and the more ſuch information, as may facilitate them, is collected, the more firmly will the truth of our faith be eſtabliſhed; and the more magnificent views will it unfold to us of the connection in which chriſtianity ſtands with the temporal and eternal welfare of mankind.

SERMON

SERMON II.

ACTS V. 38, 39.

If this Counſel, or this Work, be of Men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.

THE miraculous propagation and final eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, the triumphs it has obtained over obſtacles the moſt formidable, and the effects it has produced by inſtruments in appearance the moſt inadequate, have frequently been urged, as deciſive proofs of its divinity and truth.

In ſupport of this argument the words now before us, which contain the famous maxim of Gamaliel, in his advice to the Jewiſh council, are ſometimes adduced.

But with whatever propriety the text may be applied to the particular caſe of chriſtianity, the general principle is not to be admitted, without many exact and intereſting diſtinctions.

Succeſs alone is undoubtedly no certain criterion of the truth and divinity of any religious ſyſtem; no abſolute proof of the concurrence and approbation of heaven. For, is it not evident, that God permits error to prevail in the world, nay ſometimes to a greater extent than the truth itſelf? The fact we cannot diſpute, where we are utterly unable to aſſign the final cauſe. The efficient cauſes do indeed ſometimes lie open to our view. They are to be found in the nature and condition of man; they do not claſh with the moral attributes of the Deity; and they ſupply abundant matter as well to gratify our curioſity, as to ſubdue our pride.

God

God has conſtitued us free agents, and has endued us with faculties, which though ſufficient, if properly exerted, to lead us into the diſcovery of truth, are ſtill limited and circumſcribed. We are therefore fallable creatures, liable to be impoſed upon either by the deluſions of our own imaginations, or by the artifices of intereſted impoſtors. Unqualified for deep ſpeculation and laborious reſearch, the great bulk of mankind is oftener directed by fancy, by prejudice, or intereſt, than by reaſon. Hence it happens, that miſled by the craft and cunning of thoſe who lie in wait to deceive, or ſeduced by doctrines flattering and agreeable to the corruption of the human heart, numbers in all ages forſaking the truth, have embraced with willingneſs, and propagated with zeal, the groſſeſt and moſt pernicious miſtakes.

If our own experience ſhould be inſufficient to convince us of theſe facts,

the hiſtory of paſt ages will teach us by melancholy examples, how extenſive an influence error has often been permitted to obtain over the minds of men. Even from the earlieſt ages of the world, down to that glorious æra when the ſun of righteouſneſs aroſe to give light to them that ſat in darkneſs and the ſhadow of death, it pleaſed the divine Providence to ſuffer the far greater part of mankind to lie in the darkeſt ignorance, with regard to the grand fundamental principles of all religion.

The worſhip, and I had almoſt ſaid, the knowledge of the one true God, were through various revolutions of empires, and amidſt various modes of life, confined within the narrow limits of Judæa. And even among the peculiar people, which had been ſeparated from the nations by an extraordinary act of divine Providence for the expreſs purpoſe of preſerving this knowledge pure and untainted, the baleful influence of error was too often

often felt. The honours due only to the great creator, were unworthily transferred to the creature; the altars of Jehovah became the ſeats of ſuperſtition and idolatry. In the days of [a] Ahab, there remained only *ſeven thouſand in Iſrael, who had not bowed the knee to Baal:* and under the impious Jeroboam, while ten tribes followed the gods of Dan and Bethel, two only continued to worſhip the Lord at Jeruſalem.

Inſtances have never been wanting of men, who from motives of intereſt, or for the acquiſition of power, have pretended to hold immediate converſe with the *Deity;* and whoſe pretences, from the ſagacious artifices of the teacher, or the abject credulity of the people, have been crowned with ſucceſs.

Rome furniſhed a Numa, who gave the higheſt ſanction and authority to the dictates of human prudence and policy, by

[a] 1 Kings xix. 18.

deliver-

delivering them to his ſubjects as the expreſs revelations of the immortal gods: and thus firmly eſtabliſhed a ſyſtem, which, with ſome ſubſequent additions, remained entire through the various revolutions of the Roman commonwealth; till at length the religion of Chriſt triumphed over Polytheiſm, and the banner of the croſs was erected on the ruins of the capitol.

Nor did the introduction of chriſtianity into the world produce any alteration, at leaſt in this reſpect, in the manner of God's dealings with mankind. Even when it pleaſed him to employ extraordinary means for an extraordinary end, and to propagate the truth by aids to which the advocates of falſhood could not have recourſe, he ſtill dealt with men as with free and rational creatures. They were ſtill left at liberty either to embrace or reject what he had revealed: and by ſome it was actually ſo far reſiſted, as to draw down the juſt judgment of infatuation as a puniſh-

a puniſhment for ſuch reſiſtance. Thus was it with the Phariſees, [b] *whoſe eyes be blinded, and whoſe hearts be hardened, leſt they ſhould ſee with their eyes, and underſtand with their hearts, and be converted.*

Even the final eſtabliſhment of the Goſpel did not totally extirpate error and deluſion from the world. Tares were ſtill permitted to ſpring up, and ſometimes even to choak the good ſeed. The hiſtory of the earlier ages of chriſtianity is little more than a melancholy recital of ſucceſſive hereſies and abſurdities; ſome of which were either plucked up by the hand of reformation, or left to wither of themſelves; while others taking deep root, were ſuffered to flouriſh a long time, and almoſt to overſhadow the church.

But let not the excellency of chriſtianity be depreciated, becauſe it failed to do what could not be done, without violence to the whole intellectual and moral con-

[b] John xii. 40, 41.

ſtitution of its profeſſors: let not the veracity of its author be impeached, becauſe his followers have ruſhed headlong into thoſe erroneous and impious opinions, which he has himſelf moſt explicitly foretold, and moſt pointedly condemned. [c] *Take heed*, ſays he, *that no man deceive you: for many ſhall come in my name, ſaying, I am Chriſt, and ſhall deceive many.*—[d] *For there ſhall ariſe falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets, and ſhall ſhew great ſigns and wonders, inſomuch that if it were poſſible, they ſhall deceive the very elect.*

Thus he foretold; and the event juſtified the prediction.

But among all the inſtances of audacious and ſucceſsful impoſture, which hiſtory has recorded, none has been more widely diffuſed, or more firmly eſtabliſhed, than that of the pretended prophet of Arabia. Born in an obſcure and uncivi-

[c] Mat. xxiv. 4, 5. [d] Ib. 24.

lized

lized country, entitled to no pre-eminence of power or authority, the grand impoſture by the mere force of a bold and fertile genius, aſſiſted by a concurrence of circumſtances univerſally auſpicious to his deſign, was enabled to obtain the moſt unbounded empire over the minds as well as perſons of a very large portion of mankind; and together with a temporal kingdom, to introduce and fix a religion, which has ſubſiſted in almoſt undiminiſhed vigour to the preſent times, through the long period of more than 1100 years.

The rapid propagation of Mahometaniſm, and the brilliant victories of its Founder, have frequently been urged by his followers as the expreſs teſtimonies of heaven to the truth and holineſs of their religion: to this argument divines of the Romiſh Communion [c] have given too much countenance, by repreſenting amplitude, duration, and temporal proſperity among the characteriſtic and infalli-

[c] See Bellarm. de Notis Eccleſiæ.

ble marks of the true church. But ſurely that can be no argument in favour of any ſyſtem, which might equally be alledged by all; and which the follower of Numa, and the diſciple of Mahomet, no leſs than the Chriſtian, have in reality pleaded as proofs of a divine original in their reſpective religions.

It appears then, as well from experience that error often does, as from the nature and conſtitution of man that it ſometimes muſt prevail in the world; and conſequently that the eſtabliſhment of any religious ſyſtem, when conſidered by itſelf, determines nothing with regard to the truth of its doctrines, or the ſuperior authority of its ſanctions. What is uncommon, muſt not be confounded with what is ſupernatural: what can be accounted for by human means, muſt not be haſtily and indiſcriminately aſcribed to divine. Succeſs, which is not only compatible with the exiſtence of a revelation immediately proceeding from God, but even

even inſeparable from it in our ideas, muſt not be inſiſted upon as directly and properly demonſtrative of the ſource whence any religion floweth.

But when the advocate for chriſtianity argues in its behalf, that ſo many thouſands were on a ſudden converted to the faith; that the religion of Chriſt ſo widely and ſo auſpiciouſly ſpread its influence over a large portion of the habitable world; *the force of this argument* is not derived from the mere prevalence of chriſtianity, but from its prevalence under thoſe peculiar circumſtances, in which the goſpel, at its firſt preaching, appears to have been placed.

Nor does the important argument in favour of chriſtianity, thus drawn from its rapid propagation, loſe any thing of its weight, from the eſtabliſhment of falſe religions in the world; unleſs it could be ſhewn that they were propagated

gated under circumſtances equally diſadvantageous, and by means equally miraculous.

How far this was the caſe with Mahometaniſm, will appear from an impartial conſideration of the ſtate of things at the time when it was propoſed to the world, and of the cauſes which contributed to its ſucceſs.

In reviewing the cauſes which ſeem to have facilitated the progreſs of Mahometiſm, the firſt and greateſt which preſents itſelf to our conſideration, is the miſerable and diſtracted ſtate of the Chriſtian church.

If in ſurveying the hiſtory of the ſixth and ſeventh centuries, we call to our remembrance that purity of doctrine, that ſimplicity of manners, that ſpirit of meekneſs and univerſal benevolence, which marked the charact[illegible] the Chriſtan in the

the Apoſtolic age, the dreadful reverſe which we here behold, cannot but ſtrike us with aſtoniſhment and horror. Divided into numberleſs parties on account of diſtinctions the moſt trifling and abſurd, contending with each other from perverſeneſs, and perſecuting each other with rancour, corrupt in opinion, and degenerate in practice, the Chriſtians of this unhappy period ſeem to have retained little more than the name and external profeſſion of their religion. Of a Chriſtian church ſcarce any veſtige remained. The moſt profligate principles and abſurd opinions were univerſally predominant; ignorance amidſt the moſt favourable opportunities of knowledge; vice amidſt the nobleſt encouragements to virtue; a pretended zeal for truth, mixt with the wildeſt extravagancies of error; an implacable ſpirit of diſcord about opinions which none could ſettle; and a general and ſtriking ſimilarity in the commiſſion of crimes, which [redacted] was the duty and intereſt of all to a[redacted]

The

The goſpel indeed was in itſelf pure and holy, while theſe hideous features of deformity characterized its infatuated profeſſors: but through the prejudiced underſtandings, and indignant tempers of men, the odium incurred by perſons was vehemently and unjuſtly transferred to things: the merits of the cauſe were not ſeparated by diſpaſſionate and nice diſtinction from the glaring imperfections of thoſe who patronized it: and the partial and temporary inefficacy of chriſtianity ſupplied a plauſible train of objections to its credibility and his uſe.

It is an obvious, though juſt remark, that true religion and learning have ever flouriſhed and fallen together. Both had now for ſome centuries been haſtening with equal and viſible ſteps to decay. The ſciences unpatronized by the emperors and perſons in authority, had long ceaſed to be conſidered as the road to wealth and honour, and were there[illegible] no longer cultivated. The intereſt[illegible] polite literature and

and philoſophy had received irreparable injuries, by the incurſions of the Goths and other barbarous nations into the weſtern provinces of the Roman empire. During the violence and danger which naturally attend theſe tumultuous ſcenes, there remained but little leiſure or opportunity for thoſe who were ſtill deſirous of attending to the liberal arts. And it is highly probable that they muſt have totally periſhed in the general confuſion, had they not found a wretched and precarious ſhelter in the cloiſters of the monks. Here indeed their ſtill venerable remains were preſerved awhile; though they received only ſuch a degree of culture, as ſerved to diſplay the glorious height from which they had fallen.

Hiſtorians have exhibited to us the moſt melancholy picture of the univerſal darkneſs and ignorance, which at the beginning of the ſeventh century had overſpread all ranks of men. Even the eccleſiaſtical

cleſiaſtical orders ſcarcely afforded an exception to this general deſcription. Among the biſhops, the grand inſtructors and defenders of the Chriſtian church, few (we are told) could be found, whoſe knowledge and abilities were ſufficient to compoſe the diſcourſes, however mean and incoherent, which their office ſometimes oblige them to deliver to the people. The greater part of thoſe among the monaſtic orders, whom the voice of an illiterate age had dignified with the character of learning, laviſhed their time and talents in ſtudying the fabulous legends of pretended ſaints and martyrs, or in compoſing hiſtories equally fabulous; rather than in the cultivation of true ſcience, or the diffuſion of uſeful knowledge.

Nor was the condition of the Eaſtern Church more favourable to the intereſts of literature. Diſtracted by the implacable animoſity of contending parties, Neſtorians,

rians, Monophyſites, and the numberleſs ſubdiviſions of thoſe two ſects, it was a ſtranger to that peace and tranquillity which is abſolutely neceſſary to the cultivation, and even the exiſtence of learning. Intent only upon the annoyance of each other, all parties had equally forſaken the broad and open paths of manly philoſophy and liberal ſcience, for the narrow and perplexing intricacies of metaphyſics. The champions of the contending factions directed alike their principal attention to the writings of Ariſtotle; and in order to arm their followers with logical ſubtleties, tranſlated many of the works of that profound philoſopher into their reſpective languages [f].

Of the writings which threw a feeble glimmering over the darkneſs of this unhappy period, the far greater part were controverſial. In the few which have remained to the preſent times, it is eaſy to

[f] See Abul-Pharaj. Hiſt. Dynaſt. p. 94.

trace the melancholy decline of piety as well as of literature. That natural and beautiful ſimplicity which is the ſtriking characteriſtic of the writings of the apoſtolic age, and of the firſt defenders of chriſtianity, was now ſucceeded by the coarſe and confuſed jargon of the ſchools, by the loud and fierce clamours of perſonal invective, and by all the diſingenuous arts of ſophiſtry, which induſtriouſly perplexed truth; and of bigotry, which perverſely oppoſed it.

While ignorance was thus extending her dominions over the Chriſtian world, ſuperſtition, her genuine offspring, followed cloſe behind. The progreſs of corruption is rapid and unbounded. When once the profeſſors of chriſtianity had departed from that purity of worſhip, and that ſimplicity of faith, which Chriſt and his apoſtles had preſcribed, and impiouſly dared to erect a ſuperſtructure of worthleſs materials upon the firm and ſolid foundations

tions of the goſpel; it was impoſſible to fix any limits to the growing corruption. One abuſe was daily added to another; and the introduction of one ſuperſtition ſerved only to pave the way for a thouſand others, more falſe and more pernicious, which followed in its train.

To go back no farther than the beginning of the third century; even at that early period, it is eaſy to obſerve the unſeemly fabric of ſuperſtitious ceremony gradually riſing upon the ruins of genuine piety. The far greater part of thoſe corrupt doctrines and vain ſuperſtitions, which formerly occaſioned the ſeparation of our anceſtors from the communion of the Romiſh church, and of which we ſtill continue to entertain a juſt abhorrence, were introduced and eſtabliſhed during the darkneſs of this and the ſucceeding ages. An extravagant veneration for departed ſaints and martyrs, the idolatrous worſhip of images and relics, and laſtly the abſurd

and fanciful notion of a Fire deſtined to purify the ſoul after death from the pollutions it had contracted while in the body; theſe opinions, which are ſtill held ſacred and eſſential by the church of Rome, were the ſucceſſive progeny of the ignorance and ſuperſtition of theſe ages.

At the time of Mahomet theſe corrupt opinions had nearly eclipſed the luſtre of the goſpel. The very eſſence of chriſtianity was loſt under a load of idle and ſuperſtitious ceremonies, which were daily multiplied without bounds; and the unmeaning pomp of a gaudy and oſtentatious worſhip was ſubſtituted in the room of the ſimple, yet nobler oblation of the heart.

The primitive Chriſtians with anxious zeal confined their worſhip to the one moſt high God, through his ſon Jeſus Chriſt; but thoſe who now called themſelves by that venerable name, had multiplied almoſt to infinity, the objects of their devotion.

Neg-

Neglecting or forgetting the grand and only mediator between God and man, the trembling votary bowed at the ſhrine of ſome reputed ſaint, a mortal frail and weak like himſelf, to implore his interceſſion, either in obtaining the favour, or in averting the vengeance of an offended God. The bleſſed Virgin was raiſed to a dignity, and adorned with titles, which neither ſcripture could warrant, nor reaſon approve: and the mother of the man Chriſt Jeſus was often honoured with a more aſſiduous devotion, and addreſſed with more frequent prayers than the ſon of God himſelf. Even the fancied remains of that croſs, on which the Saviour of mankind had died, to expiate the ſins of the world; the images of the ſaints who had laboured to diſſeminate, and the bones of the martyrs, who had died to confirm the faith, were now by the arts of a deſigning prieſthood, and the ignorance of a ſuperſtitious multitude, held up as proper objects of religious adoration.

Where opinions are thus depraved, it is unreaſonable to expect that the practice ſhould be exemplary. Accordingly, we find, that the decay of morality kept equal pace with that of piety.

The wealth, as well as the privileges and authority of the clergy, had increaſed conſiderably during the reign of ignorance and ſuperſtition. To this increaſe nothing had more effectually contributed, than the opinion that remiſſion of ſins, however black and heinous, was to be purchaſed by the liberality of the penitent to the churches and the miniſtry; and that the interceſſion of departed ſaints was to be bought by ſuitable offerings preſented on the altars which were conſecrated to their memory.

But the increaſing wealth of the eccleſiaſtical orders gradually introduced among them all that train of vices and follies, which affluence and proſperity naturally bring with them. Their luxury, their pride,

pride, their ambition knew no bounds. Hence the turbulent and ſhameleſs contentions of the biſhops concerning the extent and authority of their ſees. Hence the frequent and almoſt perpetual ſtruggles between the biſhops of Rome and Conſtantinople, the two grand rulers of the Chriſtian church, to the irreparable injury and diſgrace of chriſtianity.

But what ſeems more peculiarly to have characterized the age of which we are ſpeaking, is the furious and relentleſs ſpirit of perſecution.

It was the ſevere remark of a Pagan hiſtorian [g] concerning the Chriſtians of the fourth century, "That their enmity toward each other, exceeded the fury of the beaſts againſt man." In the ſucceeding ages this evil gradually increaſed, till at length the unworthy profeſſors of chriſtianity had univerſally let looſe the

[g] Ammian. Marcell. lib. xxii. cap. v. p. 253.

ſavage ſpirit of perſecution upon each other without reſtraint, and without remorſe. That charity and univerſal benevolence which the great author of their religion ſo often enjoined, and ſo well exemplified in his own life and character, were by his degenerate followers either forgotten or diſregarded. Varieties of opinions, which were rather nominal than real, and ſhades of difference which are ſcarcely perceptible to the acuteſt obſerver in the preſent age, were deemed ſufficient to make void alike the ſpirit, and awful commands of the goſpel, the ſacred privileges of humanity, and the tender ties of relationſhip. The blind fury of ſuperſtitious zeal extinguiſhed the tendereſt ſentiments of nature: the majeſty of the laws was trampled on and violated with impunity: the cities of the Eaſt were deluged with blood.

Such is the melancholy picture of complicated miſery and diſtraction, which hiſtorians have univerſally drawn of the Chriſtian

Chriſtian world in general, and of the Eaſtern church in particular, at the opening of the ſeventh century.

It may be ſufficient to have thus briefly repreſented the diſtinguiſhing particulars of the ſtate of chriſtianity, at the time when Mahomet aſſumed the prophetic character. The advantages and aſſiſtance which the impoſtor derived from theſe circumſtances of his times, in the propagation and eſtabliſhment of his new religion, are ſufficiently obvious: it is neceſſary only to remark, that theſe advantages were ſeized with irreſiſtible ardour, and purſued with unremitted activity.

If the corruptions and diſtreſſes of chriſtianity were thus ſignally favourable to the aſpiring views of Mahomet, the political and religious ſtate of Arabia at that time, contributed not leſs remarkably to the ſucceſs of the impoſtor.

While

While the once formidable empires, of Rome on the one hand, overwhelmed by the fierce incurſions of the northern barbarians, and of Perſia on the other, diſtracted by its own inteſtine diviſions, were evidently in the laſt ſtage of decay, Arabia was in every reſpect proſperous and flouriſhing. Naturally populous in itſelf, it had received a very conſiderable acceſſion of inhabitants from the Grecian empire; from whence the violence of regious perſecution had driven great numbers to ſeek an aſylum in a country, where they might enjoy their opinions without interruption, and profeſs them without danger.

Arabia had ever been celebrated as the ſeat of unbounded liberty: divided into many independent tribes, it of courſe admitted an almoſt endleſs variety of religious opinions.

The Jews had early eſtabliſhed themſelves in this country, even before the time

time of the apoſtles; for the Arabians are enumerated among thoſe who came to celebrate the feaſt of pentecoſt [h]: and at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem by the Roman power, many of them eſcaped hither, as to a place of refuge from the dreadful calamities, which the juſt vengeance of God inflicted on their nation. Chriſtianity had alſo made a very conſiderable progreſs among ſome of the tribes of Arabia; and in particular that ſect of it, which was diſtinguiſhed by the title of Jacobites.

But the religion which was moſt extenſively diſſeminated, and moſt highly eſteemed among the Arabians, before the time of Mahomet, was idolatry. Of this there were ſeveral diſtinct kinds: but the predominant ſpecies appears to have been that of the Sabians; who held the unity of God, though at the ſame time they worſhipped the fixed ſtars, and planets, the angels, and their images, as ſubordi-

[h] Acts ii. 11.

nate

nate deities whoſe mediation with the one moſt high and ſupreme God they ardently implored.

From the neighbouring ſituation and frequent intercourſe which ſubſiſted between the Perſians and the inhabitants of Arabia, the religion of the Magi had likewiſe found its way, and obtained an eſtabliſhment among ſome of their tribes.

To this divided ſtate of the religion and government of Arabia, doubtleſs much of the ſucceſs, if not the very exiſtence of Mahometaniſm, may be reaſonably aſcribed. Had the various unconnected tribes of that extenſive country been united under one common government, the daring project muſt quickly and inevitably have been cruſhed by the weight of ſuperior power. Or, had one common ſyſtem of religious worſhip been univerſally received throughout the whole, the impoſtor muſt certainly have ſunk under the attempt to

ſubvert

ſubvert the eſtabliſhed belief and opinions of his country.

Prejudices derived from early education, and confirmed by habit, become as it were interwoven with our very conſtitution: and thoſe opinions which ſeem connected with the awful ſanctions and the precious intereſt of religion, we are always diſpoſed to watch with unuſual jealouſy, and to guard with unuſual firmneſs. Hence ariſes *the neceſſity which every impoſtor* is under of adapting his ſchemes to the preconceived notions of thoſe whom he deſigns to miſlead. The moſt careleſs obſerver cannot but remark, that this ſpirit of accommodation ſtrongly diſtinguiſhes the conduct of Mahomet, and the character of his religion. With the Jew he maintained the inſpiration of Moſes, the authority of the pentateuch, and of the prophetic writings. With the Chriſtian he admitted the divine miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, and the truth of the goſpel. He even attempted to found his own pre-

tenſions

tentions on the preceding revelations of Moſes and of Chriſt: and profeſſed with much plauſibility, that he was ſent to purify a religion which originally came down from heaven, from the pollutions it had unhappily contracted during its reſidence among a frail and degenerate race of beings; to ſhut the book; to cloſe the ſeal of prophecy; and to communicate the laſt gracious offers of divine mercy and inſtruction to ſinful man.

To win the affections of his idolatrous countrymen, he indulged their prejudices; he gave a new and ſuperior ſanction to their favourite ceremonies and cuſtoms, and adorned them with more pompous and attracting embelliſhments.

To the original ſucceſs of this crafty and well-concerted ſcheme, nothing perhaps more effectually contributed than the extreme and deplorable want of all intellectual culture, under which the far greater part of the Arabians then labour-

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ed. Ignorance is ever the ſtrongeſt and the ſafeſt ground, on which impoſture can be erected. Civilization at that time had made but little progreſs in Arabia. The art of writing had been known and practiſed by their countryman Job, and by the tribe of Hamyar, for many centuries before the birth of Mahomet: but even at that late period the reſt of the Arabs were totally unacquainted with this uſeful art. Thoſe of Mecca in particular, to whom the pretended prophet firſt aſſerted his divine commiſſion, and propoſed his new religion, were peculiarly diſtinguiſhed as ignorant and illiterate, even to a proverb.

Accuſtomed continually to a roving and unſettled life, the greater part of the Arabs carried their literary purſuits no farther than to the compoſition of rude, though ſometimes beautiful verſes on the ſubjects of love or war; or they amuſed themſelves by frequently reciting the favourite works of their moſt celebrated

poets.

poets. The paſtoral life has ever been deemed favourable to the muſes. Accordingly we find that in works of imagination, the Arabs, even in their uncivilized ſtate, were not wholly deſtitute of merit: but to the profound reſearches of philoſophy, and the laboured deductions of reaſon, they were of neceſſity entire ſtrangers.

The ignorance, the doubts, and the uncertainty which univerſally prevailed among the Arabians, with regard to the immortality of the ſoul, was alſo a circumſtance which had no inconſiderable influence in the eſtabliſhment of Mahometaniſm. Many of them abſolutely denied the poſſibility of a future ſtate of exiſtence; and without the ſmalleſt expectation of a reſurrection, terminated all their views in the grave. There were others indeed among them, who had conceived a more exalted, and in ſome reſpects a juſter idea of human nature; who imagined that death though it might ſuſ-

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pend, yet did not put a final period to man's exiſtence; and who raiſed their hopes to ſome happier country, where, after their departure from this world, they ſhould again be called into being. Whether this doctrine had been tranſmitted to them through the medium of tradition, or whether they had received ſome intimations of it from the Chriſtians, or the Jews, who were diſperſed through the Eaſt, is uncertain. But though they might be convinced of their future exiſtence, yet they were totally unable to form any rational ideas about the mode of that exiſtence, or about the moral conſtitution of that ſtate that was deſtined to receive them. Their notions of another world ſeem to have been entirely ſenſual, and formed only on the model of the preſent. They imagined that the ſame paſſions, the ſame wants and infirmities which they felt on earth would ſtill attend them beyond the grave; and believed that even the animals which had contributed to their eaſe and convenience

in the preſent, would be no leſs neceſſary to their happineſs in a future life.

Such was the ſtate of the nation, and ſuch were the people, to whom Mahomet firſt offered a religion; which while it retained almoſt every principle and opinion that immemorial cuſtom had taught them to revere, at the ſame time held forth new doctrines, the moſt pleaſing and captivating to the human heart. To thoſe among them *who preſumed not to* lift their hopes beyond the preſent life, but looked forward with ſullen acquieſcence to the gloomy proſpect of annihilation, the promiſe of an eternal ſtate of exiſtence, to be paſſed in conſummate happineſs, could not but afford the ſtrongeſt and moſt irreſiſtible attractions. Others who already indulged a faint, though pleaſing deſire of immortality, would embrace with eagerneſs a clearer and more diſtinct proſpect of futurity; which at once enlarged, and confirmed their former hopes.

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The Mahometan paradiſe was adorned with all the gayeſt colours of the imagination. A felicity conſiſting only of pure and ſpiritual pleaſure, would have been too refined for the groſs and ſenſual conceptions of the uncivilized tribes of Arabia. Gardens fairer than that of Eden, watered by a thouſand ſtreams, and enlivened by the blooming beauties of paradiſe, ſeemed better calculated to excite their deſires, and to engage their attention.

While this happineſs and theſe pleaſures were thus graciouſly offered to the faithful, who received and embraced his new religion; the moſt dreadful torments which imagination could ſuggeſt, were at the ſame time denounced againſt an unbelieving world.

Tempted on the one hand by promiſes thus ſpecious and alluring, and aſſailed on the other by new and unheard of terrors,

againſt which his former principles could afford him no certain reſource; what wonder is it, that the unlettered Arabian willingly embraced a religion, which thus forcibly addreſſed itſelf to his ſtrongeſt paſſions? His hopes and fears alike conſpired to rouſe, and to ſtrengthen his faith: and if he could only once perſuade himſelf that the religion which was offered him, might poſſibly be true, the reaſon even of the moſt ignorant barbarian would immediately inform him, that in rejecting ſuch a religion he *might* be preſumptuous, and in embracing it he *could* not be imprudent.

But further, it was a circumſtance which probably had very conſiderable weight in recommending the religion of Mahomet to his countrymen, and to the world, that the doctrines which it taught, were in general the plaineſt and moſt ſimple that can be imagined; and that it totally diſclaimed all thoſe myſteries, at which the pride of human reaſon is ſo

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apt to revolt. The ſacred and myſterious doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, which the religion of Chriſt had firſt revealed to mankind, has ever been a ſtone of ſtumbling, and a rock of offence to the proud diſputers of this world. To this doctrine, becauſe above the reach of human reaſon, infidelity has often objected; and preſumptuouſly dared to deny what it could not comprehend: whilſt the Chriſtian, ſatisfied that it is expreſly authorized by that religion which he knows to be divine, believes and adores in humble and ſubmiſſive ſilence.

But the Unity of God, which forms the grand fundamental doctrine of Mahometaniſm, is alſo univerſally admitted as one of the firſt principles of natural religion. To this doctrine (as has been already obſerved) the greater part of the Arabians before the time of Mahomet were no ſtrangers: and though in practice they had miſerably corrupted themſelves, by the worſhip of inferior agents,

yet in belief they ſtill maintained the unity of the divine nature ſacred and inviolate.

We have now taken a ſhort, though comprehenſive view of the principal cauſes, which ſeem to have contributed moſt materially to the original ſucceſs of Mahometaniſm. The means by which it was afterwards ſo firmly eſtabliſhed and ſo widely propagated through the world, are too plain, as well as too generally known, to require either minute diſcuſſion, or profound remarks.

No ſooner had the inſinuating addreſs of the impoſtor (aſſiſted by that concurrence of favourable circumſtances which we have enumerated) enabled him to aſſemble a party ſufficient to ſupport his ambitious deſigns, than he threw off the maſk which was no longer neceſſary; and diſclaiming the ſofter arts of perſuaſion and reaſoning, immediately adopted a quicker and more efficacious mode of

converſion. It was alledged by the deceiver, that ſince a diſobedient world had diſdained, or rejected the ineffectual ſummons which the divine mercy had ſent in former times by the prophets, who came with appeals to the ſenſes and reaſon of mankind; it had now pleaſed the Almighty to ſend forth his laſt great prophet, by the ſtrength of his arm and by the power of the ſword, to compel men to embrace the truth.

Acting under the fancied authority of this divine commiſſion, looking forward with anxious expectation to the joys of Paradiſe, and the glorious crown of martyrdom which was laid up for thoſe who ſhould periſh in the propagation of the faith, and convinced that their lot, whether of life or death, was abſolutely and inevitably predetermined; the firſt followers of Mahomet were animated with that enthuſiaſtic zeal, which inſpires the moſt invincible contempt of danger and of death.

The fellow citizens of the impoſtor, and thoſe of his tribe, to whoſe immediate charge the ſacred temple had long been entruſted, either from principle, or from pride, for a while defended with unſhaken zeal, though with various ſucceſs, the religion of their fathers.

Exhauſted, however, by a bloody and unavailing oppoſition, they were at laſt compelled to yield to the ſuperior addreſs, or more ferocious courage of their adverſaries.

The ſubmiſſion of the holy city at once ſecured the authority, and completed the triumph of the conqueror.

The ſenſeleſs objects of Arabian devotion, which ignorance and ſuperſtition had raiſed to the rank of divinities, were now with impetuous and undiſtinguiſhing zeal, diſgraced and demoliſhed. The ſacred and venerable character of the temple, was however ſtill preſerved inviolate;

late; its worſhip, its ceremonies, and its ordinances were ſtill retained: with this difference only, that they were transferred from inferior and dependent deities, to the one moſt high and ſupreme God.

Flattered by this attention to their prejudices and their intereſts, and influenced by the dread of ſuperior power, the inhabitants of Mecca and its neighbourhood contemplated in ſilence the diſgraceful overthrow of their idols; and with real or affected readineſs, flocked to the ſtandard, and bowed before the God of Mahomet.

Poſſeſſed of the grand object of his wiſhes, the impoſtor no longer ſcrupled to aſſume the enſigns of temporal as well as of ſpiritual dominion; and after a ſolemn inauguration, exacted an oath of fidelity and allegiance from his new ſubjects. The troops of the imperial prophet were now ſent forth through every part of Arabia, prepared alike to convert

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by inſtruction, or to ſubdue by arms, the enemies of the faith. The effects of their zeal and of their courage were ſoon apparent: the ſtreets of Medina were crowded with ambaſſadors from various tribes, who came to humble themſelves before the conqueror of Mecca, and to acknowledge both the unity of God and the authority of his prophet.

Thus rapidly did the religion of Mahomet triumph over all the oppoſition of his idolatrous countrymen; and thus was his empire at length firmly eſtabliſhed throughout the ſeveral provinces of Arabia. But emboldened only, and inflamed, rather than ſatiated, by ſuch extraordinary ſucceſs, the aſpiring adventurer began to raiſe his views ſtill higher, and to aim at more extenſive dominion.

The territories of the Grecian empire had attracted his attention; and the rich and fertile province of Syria, from its neighbouring ſituation was particularly

marked out as the next object of his ambitious deſires. But while he was thus fortunate in the accompliſhment of ſo great and arduous an enterpriſe, and thus meditating ſtill greater atchievements; we behold death arreſting the conqueror in the midſt of his honours, and cloſing at once his victories and his projects.

Inſinuating in his manners, and profound in his ſchemes, he had, however, gained ſo complete an aſcendancy over the minds of his followers, and had ſettled his power on ſo ſolid a foundation, that little remained to be done by his ſucceſſors, but to purſue the path which he had traced.

The leaders whom he had choſen, were men of diſtinguiſhed talents and abilities: and from them his immediate ſucceſſors were elected. When raiſed to the empire, like the prophet whom they repreſented, they were inveſted with ſupreme power both in temporal and ſpiritual affairs: and

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being animated by a zeal, like his, for the ſupport and propagation of their religion, they faithfully executed his commands, and emulouſly copied his example.

The Arabians, naturally brave and warlike, had, even in their divided ſtate, reſiſted with ſucceſs every exertion of the Roman power. But when the enterpriſing genius of Mahomet had united their diſcordant tribes under one common head, had made them unanimous in opinion, conſpiring in the ſame deſign, and uniting diſcipline and military ſkill with religious ardour and enthuſiaſm; it is eaſy to imagine, that they muſt have been extremely formidable, and capable of producing the moſt extraordinary revolutions in the hiſtory of the world. When they beheld their country raiſed from barbariſm and obſcurity to power and dominion, national pride began to operate on their minds; and united with the hopes of plunder from the rich and luxurious provinces of Aſia, added new weight to the com-

commands of their prophet, and contributed much to ſtimulate their zeal, and animate their exertions.

To oppoſe theſe formidable foes, acting upon motives thus forcible, we behold on the one hand an enfeebled empire already ſinking under its own weight; and on the other, a corrupt and divided church, ſome of whoſe degenerate ſons labour to haſten, whilſt others contemplate with indolent *indifference, the approaching ruin.*

Under theſe circumſtances, the intrepid valour and daring exertions of the Saracens ſoon ſhook the throne of the Cæſars: while the Emperors more attentive to theological controverſies, than to the dangers which ſurrounded their government, beheld them, almoſt without emotion, diſmembering the empire, and violently wreſting from it the richeſt and moſt valuable provinces of Aſia and Africa. Egypt, fertile in reſources; Paleſtine, ever dear and ſacred to the Chriſtians, as the

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ſcene on which the ſon of God had lived and died; and Syria, celebrated for its wealth and rich productions, were numbered among the firſt conqueſts of the Caliphs.

The great and extenſive empire of Perſia, which had always defied the power, and often inſulted with impunity the majeſty of Rome, after a faint and unavailing reſiſtance, fell an eaſy prey to the Saracen arms. The religion of the *Magi*, venerable on account of its high antiquity, which even the conqueror of Darius had ſpared and reſpected, was now utterly ſubverted; while the victorious Koran was triumphantly eſtabliſhed on the ruin of its altars. Such was the rapidity with which the arms of the Caliphs over-ran province after province, and conquered kingdom after kingdom: and thus in leſs than a century do we behold their empire rootedly fixed over a great part of the Eaſtern world; and even extended ſo far

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as to threaten Europe with the ſame intolerable bondage.

As religion was the cauſe and the object of all their conqueſts, and as the battles they fought were (according to their conceptions) the battles of the Lord; the propagation of their faith naturally kept pace with the extenſion of their empire.

To their Pagan ſubjects no other alternative was allowed *than an immediate* deſertion of *their former errors*, and converſion to the faith, or an inſtant and cruel death by the hands of a barbarous zealot. To the Chriſtian indeed the policy, rather than the mercy of his Mahometan conquerors, offered a ſomewhat milder choice: he was allowed the peculiar privilege of compounding for the preſervation of his religion and his life by the payment of a conſtant and heavy tribute. What extraordinary efficacy this mode of converſion muſt have carried with it, to men who had already loſt almoſt

moſt every thing but the name of their religion, may eaſily be imagined. Nor can we wonder, if in this ſituation of affairs, the ſtill ſmall voice of conſcience was unheard amidſt the cries of intereſt; or if temporal eaſe and ſecurity under the banners of a victorious prophet, were preferred to that ſcandal and thoſe diſtreſſes, to which the religion of a lowly and crucified Saviour now ſubjected its profeſſors.

From an attentive and impartial conſideration of the ſeveral particulars which have now been enumerated, it will readily appear, how little force is due to that ſpecious argument for the truth of the Mahometan religion, which has often been drawn by its advocates from the ſplendid victories and uninterrupted ſucceſs of its firſt propagators.

When we behold a man, born to poverty, and all the obſcurity of private life, ſuddenly raiſing himſelf to power the moſt abſo-

abſolute, and uniting the jarring opinions and hoſtile tribes of his countrymen in one common faith and government, under himſelf; when we behold a people, before almoſt wholly unknown, and unheard of in the annals of hiſtory, ruſhing with unparalleled rapidity to empire and to glory, and eſtabliſhing at once a new religion, and a new form of government, over a large portion of the habitable world: doubtleſs our aſtoniſhment is excited at ſuch unexpected and intereſting events.

But (to repeat what has been before obſerved) that which is ſingular and uncommon, is not therefore to be deemed miraculous. Revolutions, however ſtupendous, which may yet lie within the compaſs of the human mind, when aſſiſted by external events, to effect, muſt not raſhly, and indiſcriminately, be imputed to the particular and immediate agency of God. Succeſs alone, as we have already ſhewn, affords no abſolute proof

of the favour and approbation of the Deity; no determinate and appropriate evidence for the truth or divine original of any doctrines or opinions.

It is only in particular ſituations, and under peculiar circumſtances, that the argument drawn from ſucceſs can be allowed to poſſeſs any weight; in ſituations, where no human ſtrength or genius could of itſelf have prevailed; under circumſtances, where impoſture could never have ſupported itſelf amidſt the dangers that viſibly ſurrounded it.

Now, that this deſcription is by no means applicable to the caſe of Mahometaniſm, is evident from the foregoing recital: from whence it appears that every circumſtance of the times, every particular in the manners and ſituation of mankind, plainly and forcibly concurred to favour the bold and artful impoſture.

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The cauſes of the original ſucceſs of Mahometaniſm may clearly be traced in the ſcandalous diviſions, and deplorable corruptions of the Chriſtian church; in the political and religious ſtate of Arabia; in the independence and want of union among its tribes; in the groſs ignorance (particularly with regard to religion) of its barbarous and uncivilized inhabitants; and laſtly, in the nature and genius of Mahometaniſm itſelf: in the faſcinating allurements of its promiſed rewards, in their agreeableneſs to the propenſities of corrupt nature in general, and to thoſe of the inhabitants of warmer climates in particular; in the artful accommodation of its doctrines and its rites to the preconceived opinions, the favourite paſſions, and the deep-rooted prejudices of thoſe to whom it was addreſſed; in the poetic elegance with which its doctrines, its precepts, and its hiſtories were adorned; and in the captivating manner in which they were delivered.

As the corrupt and diſtracted ſtate of the Chriſtian Church had originally aſſiſted the riſe, ſo did it operate with ſtill greater force in favour of the ſubſequent progreſs of Mahometan impoſture. If indeed we allow to this cauſe its proper influence; if we conſider the weakneſs of the ſurrounding nations, and the natural ſtrength of Arabia, now collected and pointed to one object; if we reflect on that fervor of zeal, and that wildneſs of enthuſiaſm, which were now ſuperadded to the native valour of a hardy and warlike people; we ſhall ceaſe to wonder at the victories and triumphs they obtained over the lukewarm and degenerate defenders of the goſpel.

Of theſe victories and theſe triumphs the propagation of their new faith was the profeſſed object and deſign: thus by violence and bloodſhed had the prophet himſelf finally eſtabliſhed his religion among his countrymen; and thus had he expreſſly commanded his followers

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to extend it over all the regions of the earth.

Of the continuance of Mahometaniſm, when thus eſtabliſhed, and of its exiſtence to the preſent times various cauſes might be aſſigned, whoſe joint operation would be ſufficient to account fully for the effect, without having recourſe to any miraculous or particular interpoſition of providence. Of theſe cauſes one only ſhall be mentioned in this place, and that, becauſe it appears to be of peculiar force and importance.

In almoſt all thoſe countries, which acknowledge the authority of Mahomet, ſo intimate is the connection, ſo abſolute the dependence of the civil government on religion, that any change in the latter muſt neceſſarily and inevitably involve the ruin and overthrow of the former. The Koran is not, like the Goſpel, to be conſidered merely as the ſtandard by which the religious opinions, the worſhip, and

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the practice of its followers are regulated; but it is alſo a political ſyſtem; on this foundation the throne itſelf is erected; from hence every law of the ſtate is derived; and by this authority every queſtion of life and of property is finally decided.

It is obvious therefore, that, in every country where Mahometaniſm had been once received and eſtabliſhed, the circumſtance which I have now mentioned, muſt have operated with uncommon weight to cruſh any important innovation in religion: ſince from this inſeparable connection between the ſanctions of religion and thoſe of the ſtate every ſuch innovation could be conſidered in no other light, than as an attempt to overturn the civil government, to looſen the bands of ſociety, and to deſtroy every privilege of law, and every ſecurity of property.

Such then being the circumſtances, and ſuch the means by which the religion of Mahomet was ſo widely diffuſed, and ſo firmly

firmly eſtabliſhed in the world; its ſucceſs, however aſtoniſhing, is capable of being accounted for by mere human cauſes; and conſequently to ſuppoſe any extraordinary and particular interpoſition of the Deity, is evidently unneceſſary and abſurd. Ultimately, indeed, this awful and memorial change in the religion and manners of ſo great a part of mankind, like every other human event, muſt be referred to the over-ruling providence of that God, whoſe judgments are unſearchable, and whoſe ways are paſt finding out; whoſe wiſdom uniformly bringeth good out of evil; and who maketh even the violence of the wicked, and the artifices of the impoſtor ſubſervient to the accompliſhment of his gracious, though myſterious deſigns.

Let not then the Chriſtian be offended, or the infidel triumph at the ſucceſsful eſtabliſhment and long continuance of ſo acknowledged an impoſture, as affording

ing any reaſonable ground of objection againſt our holy faith.

Let theſe events rather be conſidered as evidences of its truth; as accompliſhments of the *general* prediction of our Lord, that *falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets ſhould ariſe, and ſhould deceive many*; and eſpecially of that *particular* and expreſs prophecy in the Revelations [i] of his beloved diſciple, which has been determined by the ableſt commentators, to relate to the impoſtor Mahomet, and to his falſe and impious religion; which *ariſing like a ſmoke out of the bottomleſs pit*, ſuddenly overſhadowed the Eaſtern world, and involved its wretched inhabitants in *darkneſs* and in error.

[i] Rev. ix. 1, &c.

SERMON III.

ACTS V. 38, 39.

If this Counſel, or this Work, be of Men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.

TO collect and generalize ideas, to give them preciſion by rules and comprehenſion by ſyſtem, is the diſtinguiſhing privilege of man. Hence ariſe thoſe principles, which are of the moſt extenſive and conſpicuous uſe in the calculation of moral probabilities, in the conduct of common life, and in aſcertaining both the evidence of facts and the tendency of actions. Hence too proceed, alike, our virtuous and deſtructive prejudices;

dices; our power of perplexing truth and of unfolding it. But the utility of general rules, invariably and neceſſarily depends upon a nice and fair adjuſtment of them to the particular circumſtances which they are employed to illuſtrate. A wide field here opens itſelf for the vigorous and honeſt exerciſe of our intellectual faculties; for the ſuſpenſion of judgment where the evidences are ſcanty, or obſcure, or contradictory; for decided and firm aſſent where they are numerous, and bright, and conſiſtent. In the mixed ſtate of human affairs, we cannot indeed be too diligent in collecting materials for enquiry; or too cautious in determining their comparative force, by the ſtandard of general rules. The moſt ordinary and familiar events are ſometimes diſtinguiſhed by peculiarities, which check the inquiſitive mind from haſty and undiſtinguiſhing aſſent. The moſt extraordinary and complicated, when attentively ſurveyed, conſtitute ſome diſtinct and general principle, to which ſimilar phenomena

mena may be reduced; or gradually unfold themſelves into a clear and perfect conformity to thoſe very rules, to which they, on their firſt appearance, were utterly irreconcileable. From the groſs conception, therefore, or the raſh application of general maxims, proceed thoſe errors which too fatally ſeduce, and thoſe difficulties which ſo often confound, the human underſtanding. On the contrary, by the diſpaſſionate and juſt uſe of them we *detect ſpecious impoſture*, and *penetrate into the moſt improbable, but moſt important truths.*

The propriety of theſe obſervations will preſent itſelf to every hearer, who oppoſes the ſingular circumſtances, under which Mahomet promulgated and eſtabliſhed his religion, to the well known, but very perverted maxim, that ſucceſs is a deciſive proof of divine interpoſition. For this reaſon, I took occaſion in the laſt diſcourſe to obſerve, that in order to accompliſh the myſterious de-

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ſigns of his providence, the Deity is often pleaſed to permit the ſucceſs of thoſe actions and opinions, which it is contrary to his nature and attributes to approve. This poſition was more particularly illuſtrated by the memorable example of the Arabian impoſtor, whoſe falſe and impious pretences to divine revelation were by the permiſſion of an unſearchable providence, crowned with an almoſt unexampled ſucceſs; and whoſe pernicious hereſy taking deep root, and bearing fruit upwards, is even now ſuffered to caſt its deadly ſhade over the far greater part of the Eaſtern world.

But to whatever extent the argument which reſults from ſucceſs may have been puſhed by the intereſted patrons of error, or the ill-judging defenders of truth; there are ſtill circumſtances, in which it is undoubtedly concluſive. Dangerous as it may be to argue from the ſucceſs of events, however extraordinary, which the acknowledged intereſts and concur-

concurring efforts of men may poſſibly have produced, there is certainly no room for miſtake in thoſe which are evidently above the reach of human ſtrength and wiſdom, and which have been effected in direct oppoſition to every earthly power.

When therefore we behold an effect produced, between which and its apparent human cauſes no ingenuity can trace any probable proportion; when we perceive a *work accompliſhed by inſtruments of known and limited powers*, which at the ſame time notoriouſly exceeds the utmoſt conceivable extent of thoſe powers; it is not only juſt and reaſonable, but it is even *neceſſary* to acknowledge, that in the finger of God we find the only adequate, and therefore the real and illuſtrious cauſe.

In carrying on theſe reflections to the gradual eſtabliſhment of the goſpel, it will be proper to conſider at large the obſtacles which oppoſed its progreſs in the

world, and the character and abilities of its firſt propagators.

It was the remark of an inſpired Apoſtle concerning the goſpel and its firſt preachers, that God [a] *had choſen the fooliſh things of the world to confound the wiſe, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that were mighty.*

Now to the candid enquirer, who views with attention the various and ſtubborn difficulties, with which the teachers of chriſtianity were unavoidably left to ſtruggle; and who conſiders the inſufficiency of the powers which they naturally poſſeſſed, to overcome thoſe difficulties, this repreſentation of the Apoſtle will ſeem by no means the boaſt of audacious vanity, or the jargon of wild fanaticiſm. When the twelve diſciples received the laſt command of their departing Lord, to [b] *go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father,*

[a] 1 Cor. i. 27. [b] Matt. xxviii. 19.

and

and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt; this extraordinary commiſſion to the eye of human reaſon might well appear the moſt romantic and viſionary. Suppoſing them, for the preſent, to have been unaſſiſted from on high; weak and illiterate as they were, could they for a moment preſume to hope for the ſucceſs of ſo perilous and ſo arduous an enterpriſe? Deprived of that protection and ſupport, which the miracles and preſence of their maſter had hitherto afforded them, their ſituation was now become the moſt forlorn and deſperate that can poſſibly be imagined. Every thing around them wore an appearance dangerous to their perſons, and hoſtile to their cauſe. In the execution of their extenſive office, they had not only to contend with the jealouſy of power, and the perſecution of authority; their progreſs was impeded by foes ſtill more formidable; by the deep-rooted prejudices, the favourite ſuperſtitions, and the darling vices of a corrupted world.

From

From their countrymen, in particular, as they had nothing to hope, they had every thing to fear. They had to oppoſe the inveteracy of cuſtom; and what was more formidable, the prejudices which aroſe from that diſtinction which the Jews had long enjoyed as the favoured people of the moſt high God; a diſtinction which had been ſupported by a train of events equally gracious and wonderful; and in ſome particular inſtances confirmed by miracles, that carried with them the very ſtamp and ſeal of omnipotence.

The promiſe of a Redeemer of Iſrael, originally made to Abraham the great founder of their nation, repeated afterwards to David, and confirmed by the concurring voice of all their Prophets, had indeed awakened among the Jews an earneſt and univerſal expectation of the appearance of the Meſſiah. The ſame prophecies which foretold the coming, had likewiſe marked out with peculiar preciſion,

preciſion, every particular concerning the character, the office, and the perſon of the Saviour. The myſterious union of the divine and human natures in the perſon of Chriſt, was repeatedly ſhadowed out, and might have been fairly inferred from theſe very prophecies, which now pathetically predicted the meanneſs, the ſufferings, and the ignominious death of the Meſſiah; and now with all the warmth and boldneſs of Eaſtern poetry, painted the temporal grandeur, the victories, and the eternity of his kingdom.

The future Redeemer was frequently and unequivocally deſcribed, as [c] *deſpiſed and rejected of men*; as *a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief*; as *wounded for the tranſgreſſions*, and *bruiſed for the iniquities of his people*; and laſtly, as cloſing his unexampled diſtreſſes and unſpotted life, like the ſheep led forth in patient and ſubmiſſive ſilence to the ſlaughter.

[c] Iſaiah liii. 3, &c.

But unable, or unwilling to reconcile theſe ſeemingly oppoſite and contradictory characters, the Jewiſh nation had long rejected with diſdain and abhorrence every idea of an inſulted and afflicted Meſſiah. Seduced by carnal views, and impelled by ambitious hopes, which their frequent captivities and diſtreſſes had ſerved only to heighten, they totally overlooked one part of their ſacred prophecies, and confined to their ſtrict and literal meaning the animated and figurative expreſſions of the other. Hence in the perſon of the Meſſiah, their promiſed deliverer, they fondly beheld a mighty and glorious King, who ſhould appear with all the pomp of temporal greatneſs, and all the terrors of earthly power, trampling upon the enemies and the oppreſſors of Iſrael, and leading forth his people amidſt the triumphs of conqueſt, and the ſplendor of dominion.

Theſe expectations at once ſo flattering to their pride, and ſo agreeable to their

their wiſhes, had long been cheriſhed with a blind and bigotted fondneſs, and tranſmitted with encreaſing ſtrength through ſucceſſive generations. The manifeſt expiration of the time preſcribed by the prophets, the departure of the ſceptre from Judah, and the ſubjection of their country to the Roman power, were circumſtances which at this time added new weight to the opinion, which had been thus endeared by early prejudice, and ſanctified by authoritative tradition. Every heart was now warmed with hope, and every eye looked forward with anxious expectation, to the moment when the glory of Zion ſhould appear, and Judæa be for ever exalted above the kingdoms of the earth; when they ſhould behold ſuppliant nations crouding into the ſanctuary, and Rome herſelf, the haughty miſtreſs of the world, bowing proſtrate at the feet of Jeruſalem.

Nor were theſe glorious expectations confined to the chiefs and rulers of the

Jews, whoſe ſuperior ſtations ſeeming to entitle them to the firſt honours and emoluments of the Meſſiah's kingdom, might perhaps have induced them more readily to embrace, and more induſtriouſly to diſſeminate an opinion, which promiſed ſo complete a gratification to their ambition. Even the diſciples of our Lord, who had been in general ſelected from the loweſt and the meaneſt of the people, long retained the ſame deluſive opinion, and indulged the ſame fallacious hopes, with the reſt of their countrymen.

Nay, ſo firmly was this belief impreſſed upon their minds, that not all the frequent and ſolemn declarations of their maſter to the contrary, were able to efface it entirely: nor, indeed, do they ſeem to have been effectually rouſed from the pleaſing dream of temporal grandeur which had captivated their imagination, till his death had tried the conſtancy of their faith, till his reſurrection had revived

vived their drooping ſpirits, and his aſcenſion into heaven had rectified their errors, and invigorated their reſolution.

From this miſtaken opinion aroſe the frequent ſtruggles for ſuperiority among them, which they have ſo ingenuouſly recorded: hence the petition of the mother of Zebedee's children: hence too the impatience and miſguided zeal of Peter, who, when Chriſt had pathetically related his approaching humiliation, his ſufferings, and his death, took him and began to rebuke him, ſaying, [d] *Be it far from thee, Lord; this ſhall not happen unto thee.*

To this may be added the words of one of the diſciples with whom our Lord, in his way to Emmaus, converſed after his reſurrection, [e] *We truſted that it had been He which ſhould have redeemed Iſrael.* This reflection aroſe from the

[d] Matt. xvi. 22. [e] Luke xxiv. 21.

ſame prejudice that had long flattered the national vanity; and expreſſes the moſt painful ſenſe of diſappointment.

When we reflect on the very extraordinary manner in which the divine Being had governed the Jewiſh nation, we cannot be ſurprized that the multitude ſhould be carried away by the infatuation, which always accompanies diſtinction. Emancipation from a ſuperior power is the natural wiſh of the human heart: and it will be increaſed, when that power is adverſe to the original conſtitution both of the ſtate in which we are born, and of the church, to which we become attached. The fondneſs which ariſes from education, and grows up with habit, becomes ſanctified by authority; and it often happens, that the very oppoſition which aims at its depreſſion, eventually eſtabliſhes its intereſts in our hearts. We recoil at the indignity, which is offered to the object we have been accuſtomed to regard with veneration: when a hoſt of

oppo-

opponents riſes up to ſink its credit, or leſſen its influence; we ſummon up new courage to defend the one, and new arguments to juſtify the other.

The contempt which the Romans diſcovered for the eccleſiaſtical and civil polity of the Jews, aggravated the evils of oppreſſion; and made the yoke of ſubjection ſtill more grievous and intolerable. Their only hope lay in their promiſed redemption by the Meſſiah. To this they looked forward with anxious and eager expectation; and they conſidered their paſt deliverances from the bondage of captivity as the auſpicious earneſts of their future freedom.

To be diſappointed in the attainment of an object which lay ſo near their hearts, and which had ſo often ſoothed the painful ſenſe of ſubjection to a foreign power, was a circumſtance too mortifying and humiliating to be ſupported by thoſe, who were deluded by popular prepoſſeſſions,

or endowed only with a common ſhare of reſignation. Hence we may ceaſe to wonder at the great oppoſition that was made to the claims of Jeſus to the character and office of the Meſſiah. A perſon ſo ignobly deſcended, ſo meanly educated, ſo deſtitute of thoſe attractions which ſolicit the notice, and engage the eſteem of the world, appeared to human view altogether unqualified for the office he preſumed to fill, and totally unworthy of the character he had thought fit to adopt. [f] *Is not this the carpenter's ſon?* was a queſtion that perſons guided by external appearances, would be ever ready to propoſe with a kind of indignant contempt, whenever he declared his embaſſy as the Son of God, or announced his prerogative as the King of the Jews.

The courſe of our Saviour's life was ill adapted to conciliate the eſteem and attention of a people, who were incapable of reconciling a mean appearance with a

[f] Matt. xiii. 55.

great

great deſign; and who imagined that the intereſts of heaven needed ſuccour from the ſplendor of this world. What could ſuch a people, faſtidious from falſe delicacy, and captious from falſe pride, expect from a man, who [g] *had not where to lay his head?* How could they who were captivated by the dazzling diſtinctions of birth, and fortune, and rank in the world, aſſociate in all the habits of familiar intercourſe with one, whoſe companions were of the loweſt occupations, and who were neither diſtinguiſhed by the ſplendor of anceſtry, nor the authority of high ſtation? Common pride revolted at the idea of ſuch degradation: and we wonder not that we ſhould find the following queſtion in the mouths of perſons, who eſtimated the goodneſs of a cauſe by the external eminence of thoſe who were its abettors. [h] *Have any of the rulers, or the Phariſees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law, are curſed.* As if they had ſaid, "Who are this

[g] Matt. viii. 20. [h] John vii. 48, 49.

man's

man's followers and aſſociates? They are ſuch as would of themſelves bring diſcredit on any cauſe, abſtractedly from the conſideration of its own merit. Do any of the rulers of the people, any of the great powers of the Sanhedrim, any perſons of diſtinction, either by depth of learning, or dignity of character; do any ſuch perſons acknowledge this Jeſus, who lays claim to the name of the Meſſiah; or attach themſelves to him under that exalted and *diſtinguiſhing character*? *No. The people who know not the law*; who never ſtudied its principles, or who have been accurſed and excommunicated for want of a due obedience to its inſtitutions, are the only ſupporters of this novel ſect. On their voice the ignoble founder of it reſts his pretenſions; and by their patronage only his preſumption is maintained."

An appeal conducted on ſuch principles as this, carries with it more force than a thouſand arguments. It flatters the pride of

of the human heart, and is level with its loweſt and moſt familiar prejudices. It was particularly well adapted to influence the minds of the Jews, who had been inſtructed to rely implicitly on the deciſions of the elders; and who had been accuſtomed, without controverſy and without heſitation, to receive the law from the mouth of the prieſt.

The ſtate of religion among the Jews was, we may eaſily conceive, inauſpicious to the intereſts of the goſpel; and formed an obſtacle to its ſucceſs too powerful for any expedient but a miracle to controul. The two great ſects into which the Jewiſh church was divided, carried away the bulk of the people: but whatever rivalſhip ſubſiſted between them, and whatever differences of opinion kept up the diſtinction of Phariſees and Sadducees, yet both united in oppoſing the goſpel; and each ſeemed to vie with the other in diſcovering a moſt incurable malignity againſt Chriſt and his diſciples. Here they forgot

their

their mutual jealouſy, and loſt ſight of every inveterate prejudice, and every jarring intereſt. The goſpel, they well knew, looked with an eye equally unfriendly on both ſects; and the leaders of each were reproved with equal firmneſs and ſeverity by Jeſus Chriſt. He did not flatter the prejudices of either, nor attempt to engage their good will by any arts of accommodation. His doctrine was in direct oppoſition to the tenets of both; and his example involved a conſtant reprehenſion of their practice. He reſiſted with equal firmneſs the haughty ſcepticiſm of the Sadducee, and the abject ſuperſtition of the Phariſee. Againſt the one he maintained the doctrine of a future life; and in the preſence of the other he expatiated on the folly of ceremonial obſervances, and the fallacy of traditional doctrines.

The religion which had been, I may venture to ſay, ſubſtituted in the room of that which was originally delivered to the Jews by God himſelf, was indeed a motley

ley and incongruous mixture of truth and falſehood, of divine revelation and human invention. Additions had been made to the Moſaic ritual; and the forms of divine worſhip were incumbered with a variety of needleſs and ſuperſtitious appendages. The true object of devotion was almoſt forgotten, and the true ſpirit of it nearly extinguiſhed, amidſt a multiplicity of unauthorized and ſuperfluous ceremonies; and external ſervices had ſuperſeded internal and moral purification. Such impoſitions, however burdenſome, were yet readily ſubmitted to by perſons, who had been taught to regard them as ſubſtitutes for moral duties. To cleanſe the body by daily ablutions, was far more eaſy than to preſerve the purity of the heart by habitual virtue. To abſtain from certain meats and drinks, required leſs reſolution and fewer conflicts, than to curb the impetuoſity of appetite, and to reſiſt the allurements of voluptuouſneſs.

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The original law, given to this people, encouraged no idea of a diſpenſation from any call of moral duty under the pretence of ceremonial obſervances. It inculcated the abſolute neceſſity, as well of internal, as external holineſs; and inſtructed the Jews always to regard ſacrifice as ſubordinate to mercy. It forbad any to flatter themſelves with the hope of acceptance for the ſake of the former, while the obligations of the latter were diſregarded, or violated; and whenever the Jews perverted the deſign of divine inſtitutions, or loſt ſight of the great objects which theſe inſtitutions were appointed to promote, then did God by his prophets warn them of their fatal miſtake; and even ſpoke of ceremonies which he had himſelf preſcribed, in terms, I had nearly ſaid, of degradation and contempt.

At the time when our bleſſed Lord began to announce his miſſion as the Meſſiah, the pernicious ſentiment reſpecting the efficacy of ceremonial obedience, had

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an almoſt univerſal prevalence over the minds of the Jews. It was not merely the ſentiment of the ignorant vulgar; but it had the ſanction of eccleſiaſtical authority to give it credit and countenance. The key of knowledge was kept in the hands of men, whoſe intereſt it was to conceal it from the people. Hence they became ignorant of the more ſpiritual and ſubſtantial parts of religion, and flattered themſelves with the moſt deluſive hopes, in the midſt of the moſt flagrant breaches, and even the moſt corrupt miſrepreſentations of the divine commands. The more plain, which were alſo the more intereſting parts of the law, were veiled and miſconſtrued, debaſed and mutilated by the Scribes and Elders; whoſe falſe gloſſes had obſcured the very fundamental principles of divine worſhip, and moral obligation: and who by calling off the attention of men from *weighty matters* to trifling and indifferent circumſtantials, had, as our Lord

Lord himſelf informed them, [i] *made the word of God of none effect through their traditions.* Their own whimſical ſpeculations, or arbitrary poſitions, had uſurped the ſeat of inſpired doctrine: they were more aſſiduous to amuſe the imagination with the dreams of the Rabbins, than to impreſs the heart with thoſe principles, which have the beſt tendency to promote a holy and upright conduct, amidſt the various ſituations and trials of life. For theſe reaſons our Lord upbraided them for the indiſcriminate regard which they paid to undoubted revelation and dubious tradition; and in conſequence of their intermixing the moſt abſurd and trifling ceremonies with the more ſolemn and authorized acts of religious ſervice, he ſaid to them, [k] *In vain do ye worſhip* God, *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

The Jews, from the beginning, had been taught to connect religion with places as

[i] Mark vii. 13.

well

well as perſons; and to affix that kind of ſanctity to the former, as well as to pay that reverence to the latter, which weak minds would be very apt to apply to all the purpoſes of ſuperſtition; and which policy would be ſure to employ as an inſtrument of ſecuring the moſt implicit ſubmiſſion to all its preſcriptions.

This people had firſt an ark built as the ſymbol of the divine preſence: in a more ſplendid *period of their hiſtory* the temple was erected; where they were inſtructed to perform the more ſolemn rites of religious worſhip.

Accuſtomed ſo much to connect the Deity with ſymbols, and his worſhip with times and places, there was nothing more mortifying to their pride, or more irreconcileable to their prejudices, than that doctrine which inculcated ſuch worſhip of [1] *the Father in ſpirit and in truth*, as was quite independent of all the forms,

[1] John iv. 23.

which authority had ſanctified, and cuſtom had familiarized: a doctrine which was regarded as a kind of blaſphemy againſt the temple, by leſſening its importance, and even ſuperſeding its neceſſity.

As the law of Moſes was of divine inſtitution, it deſerved, and demanded the moſt ſerious regards; and to ſlight any of its ſervices, was to inſult the authority which enjoined them. The veneration that was inſpired by the ſenſe of its original, was perfectly right in its principle; though ſuperſtition had engrafted on it many falſe and ridiculous opinions. As the law was allowed to be divine, we need not wonder that it was univerſally believed by this people, to be perpetual alſo. The ſame prejudices, therefore, would in different circumſtances lead the Jews to act differently: at one moment they perverted the law by human invention, and in the next they inferred its immutability from its divine origin. What then could they think of a teacher, who while pro-

feſſing his miſſion from God, introduced a religion which abrogated inſtitutions confeſſedly derived from the ſame God?

When we reflect on the general ſtate of the Jewiſh church, and the particular principles which prevailed among the different orders of which it was compoſed, and the different ſects into which it was divided; when we conſider what were their modes of worſhip, and what their habits of life; how inveterate their prejudices; and how flattering their expectations; how ſtubborn was their pride, which aroſe from their diſtinction, and how tenacious of all thoſe privileges, which were the emblems of that diſtinction; when we revolve theſe conſiderations in our minds, inſtead of being ſurprized at the oppoſition, which the Jews of all ranks and denominations made to Jeſus Chriſt; we may rather wonder that a man ſhould ariſe from among them, who ſhould attempt to lay the foundation of a new religion on the overthrow of all

that had been held ſacred and venerable for ages; a religion which ſubverted national diſtinctions, inſtead of eſtabliſhing them; which mortified national pride, inſtead of cheriſhing it; which corrected every inveterate error; which ſwept away all the idle incumbrances of external rites; and ſtripped of its imaginary ſanctity even the temple of Jeruſalem.

What had a religion ſuch as this to expect from the people to whom it was firſt preached? What, but all the contempt that vanity could manifeſt; and all the oppoſition which malice could effect?

On the other hand, what could inſpire in the breaſt of him that preached it, a confidence of ſucceſs, but the wiſdom of God? And what, but the power of God, could give that ſucceſs?

As the goſpel had the moſt formidable oppoſition to ſtruggle with from the people to whom it was firſt preached, ſo was

it called to a conflict equally arduous, and to human appearance unavailing and deſperate, with the reſt of mankind, who were profeſſedly included in the grand and extenſive objects it had in view. Its deſign was the moſt liberal that humanity could have wiſhed, or benevolence could have planned. But while its extent gave diſguſt to the Jews, whoſe ſelfiſhneſs could not bear to ſee that grace made univerſal, which they had hitherto fondly conſidered as appropriate and peculiar to themſelves; ſo on the other hand, the rewards which this grace was deſigned to beſtow, and the means by which individuals might participate of its bleſſings, were ſuch as were neither ſuited to the taſte of the Gentiles, nor reconcileable with their cuſtoms, principles, or purſuits.

At the time when Chriſt appeared, the Roman empire had reached the very meridian of its glory. It was the illuſtrious period, when power and policy receiving

aid from learning and ſcience, and embelliſhment from the orators and the poets, gave law to the world, directed its taſte, and even controuled its opinions. It was the age when enquiry was awake and active on every ſubject that was ſuppoſed to be of curious or uſeful inveſtigation, whether in the natural or the intellectual world. It was, in ſhort, ſuch an age as impoſture muſt have found in every reſpect the leaſt auſpicious to its deſigns; eſpecially ſuch an impoſture as chriſtianity, if it had deſerved the name.

But to repreſent in the ſtrongeſt light the great diſadvantages, under which the goſpel laboured at its firſt publication, it will be proper to give a ſhort view of the ſtate of philoſophy and religion among the Gentiles at that period.

With reſpect to the former, there were principles common to the various claſſes and profeſſions into which the unbounded licence of fancy and ſpeculation had divided

vided it, which were in the higheſt degree hoſtile to the ſimplicity of Chriſtian faith, and to the purity of Chriſtian practice. Viewed merely in theory, it juſtly merited the cenſure paſſed on it by the Apoſtles: and conſidered in a practical light, it deſerved ſtill ſeverer reprehenſion. At beſt it was [m] *vain deceit:* for, whether it reaſoned on metaphyſics, or theology; on God, or nature; its poſitions were arbitrary, and its concluſions fallacious. Far removed from the ſimple and pure dictates of common ſenſe, it involved itſelf in intricacies that tended to embarraſs the underſtanding; and while it amuſed the genius of ſpeculation, it either ſeduced the judgment into a raſh and ſtubborn dogmatiſm, or infuſed doubts which led to an univerſal ſcepticiſm. Bold and daring in enquiries beyond the ſphere of reaſon, it affected to explain what it could not comprehend, or preſume to condemn what it could not account for. Hence ſprung philoſophers who erected ſyſtems

[m] Col. xi. 8.

of what was [n] *falsely called science*, according to their particular prejudices; and who made partial appearances the criteria of general principles. Shall we wonder that men, who indulged their fancies in such excursions into the unbounded wilds of speculation, [o] *became vain in their imaginations; and that their foolish heart was darkened?*

But their philosophy was not merely vain; it was pernicious also. It not only deluded the understanding, but corrupted the heart. It unsettled the very first principles of virtue and religion; it weakened, if not totally destroyed their best motives; and rendered their most powerful sanctions, if not absolutely abortive, yet at least uncertain.

Carrying its presumptuous and ungoverned speculation into the very essence of the Divinity, and straining its eager sight to penetrate the pavilion of darkness

[n] 1 Tim. vi. 20. [o] Rom. i. 21.

which

which encircles the eternal throne, it firſt doubted, and at length denied the exiſtence of a firſt cauſe independent of nature, and of a providence that ſuperintends its laws, and governs the concerns of mankind.

That great doctrine, which is the moſt powerful guardian of virtue and religion, and which of all others has the moſt effectual tendency to influence our hopes and fears, *I mean the doctrine of a future ſtate*, was totally rejected by the greater part of the Pagan philoſophers; and rendered doubtful and equivocal by their moſt diſtinguiſhed moraliſts. It was taught, and even enforced by legiſlators from motives of policy; while to philoſophy was reſerved the privilege of contradicting it in the ſchools.

Some of the philoſophers, indeed, contended for a future exiſtence, in which no moral diſpenſation of rewards and puniſhments was to take place: for after the expiration

piration of the Great Year the Stoics ſuppoſed, that the ſame ſyſtem would ariſe; after the general conflagration, the ſame train of events would follow; the ſame number of beings exiſt, and act in the ſame circumſtances; the ſame virtues be depreſſed, and the ſame vices triumphant, in endleſs and unalterable ſucceſſion.

Even thoſe who may be juſtly eſteemed the wiſeſt and moſt virtuous that the Pagan world could boaſt of, in effect overthrew the doctrine they have been ſuppoſed to patronize. They defended its influence on human conduct, by admitting it only under the idea of a re-union with the nature of the Deity; the great eternal ONE, from whom all ſouls proceed, and into whoſe all-comprehending eſſence they are at death reſolved again; and like a bubble burſt and loſt in the parent ocean, are ſwallowed up in the immenſity of God; and thus all perſonal identity and ſeparate conſciouſneſs are for ever extinguiſhed. This is the ſublime

of

of Pagan philoſophy, exalted by the joint power of metaphyſics and theology!

The ſuperſtitions of the Heathen world were as oppoſite to the genius of Chriſtian worſhip, as its philoſophy was adverſe to the principles of its faith. They were ſuch as were repugnant to every rule of devotion laid down by our bleſſed Lord. They were ſuch as could not be mixed with the Chriſtian rites by any arts of accommodation; by any modes of melioration, or refinement. On the contrary, they were altogether to be rejected; and the very foundation on which they were reared and ſupported was to be totally deſtroyed. For the worſhip which was eſtabliſhed in the Pagan world, was not merely abſurd; it was impious in the extreme. It was debauched by an idolatry, which had a multiplicity of the moſt execrable divinities for its objects. The gods of the heathen, who at beſt were but juſt lifted above humanity, were in a thouſand inſtances ſunk below

it,

it, by crimes that were a diſgrace to nature, and by cruelties that would ſhock even the moſt barbarous ſavage. Thoſe rites which policy had conſecrated to their altars, and which ignorance revered with ſtupid admiration, frequently degenerated into ſcenes of madneſs, laſciviouſneſs, and cruelty. Their oracles, their auguries, and their ſacrifices; their public ſpectacles, and ſplendid games; yea, the whole apparatus of Pagan ſuperſtition were the engines of political tyranny, and of popular deluſion, and barred all acceſs to the entrance of truth and freedom, purity and ſimplicity.

To the oppoſition which aroſe on theſe grounds, we may add another ſource of diſlike, which prevailed more eſpecially among the ſubjects of the Roman empire, to the founder, and the firſt preachers, of the Chriſtian religion.

They were Jews: and of all characters, that of a Jew was the moſt deſpiſed and

and abhorred among the gentiles. The diſtinction which this people claimed, was offenſive and mortifying to other nations; and the contrariety of their civil cuſtoms and modes of worſhip to the practice of the whole world, rendered them the objects of univerſal deteſtation. A religion originating with a Jew, and ſupported by perſons of the ſame character, had, independently of every other circumſtance, but little proſpect of gaining proſelytes among the gentiles; eſpecially gentiles of the more poliſhed ſtates. They would naturally aſſociate with it their ideas of the Jewiſh character; and the abhorrence excited by the one, would be extended, without heſitation and without diſtinction, to the other.

I have thus attempted to ſet before you ſome of the principal cauſes of the oppoſition which was made to the firſt propogation of Chriſtianity.

The

The ſucceſs of the goſpel in the time of our bleſſed Lord, was truly aſtoniſhing, if we conſider who he was, and what he had to encounter. But its more rapid and extenſive propagation after his death, is a circumſtance that excites ſtill higher admiration.

Deſtitute of all human advantages, protected by no authority, aſſiſted by no art; not recommended by the reputation of its author, not enforced by eloquence in its advocates, *the word of God grew mightily and prevailed.* Twelve men, poor, and artleſs, and illiterate, we behold triumphing over the fierceſt and moſt determined oppoſition; over the tyranny of the magiſtrate, and the ſubtleties of the philoſopher; over the prejudices of the Gentile, and the bigotry of the Jew. They eſtabliſhed a religion, which held forth high and venerable myſteries, ſuch as the pride of man would induce him to ſuſpect, becauſe he could not perfectly comprehend them; which preached doctrines

pure

pure and ſpiritual, ſuch as corrupt nature was prone to oppoſe, becauſe it ſhrunk from the ſeverity of their diſcipline; which required its followers to renounce almoſt every opinion they had embraced as ſacred, and every intereſt they had purſued as important; which even expoſed them to every ſpecies of danger and infamy; to perſecution unmerited and unpitied; to the gloom of a priſon, and to the pangs of death. Hopeleſs as this proſpect might appear to the view of ſhort-ſighted man, the goſpel yet emerged from the obſcurity in which it was likely to be overwhelmed by the complicated diſtreſſes of its friends, and the unrelenting cruelty of its foes. It ſucceeded in a peculiar degree, and in a peculiar manner; it derived that ſucceſs from truth; and obtained it under circumſtances, where falſehood muſt have been detected and cruſhed.

In vain therefore has the inſidious ingenuity of the infidel and ſceptic been employed

employed in the prepoſterous endeavour of accounting for the miraculous ſucceſs of Chriſtianity from cauſes merely human. The true philoſopher, who will reſt ſatisfied with no cauſe but what is fully adequate to the effects produced, readily acknowledges the aſſiſtance of God, in the witneſs he bare to the preaching of the Apoſtles, by many ſigns, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

The rational advocate for Chriſtianity ſcorns to ſhelter himſelf in ſceptical and diſingenuous miſrepreſentation. He knows the force of ſecondary cauſes; he with well-founded exultation employs them as additional arguments for the ſoundneſs of his faith; he derives the ſtrongeſt ſupport for their admirable and ſtriking conſiſtence with the pretences of a religion, which diſclaimed the uſe of thoſe engines by which impoſture is uſually maintained, the intrigues, I mean, of policy, and the violence of arms. But he, at the ſame time, contends, that while the

the intereſts of the goſpel were promoted by thoſe circumſtances which muſt have been fatal to every falſe religion, they were chiefly and primarily promoted by other and more efficacious methods; by the power of God which enabled the founder of Chriſtianity to perform what unaided man never performed; and by the wiſdom of God, which aſſiſted him in ſpeaking as man never ſpake.

A living writer, the elegance of whoſe ſtyle ſeems to have conferred a very alarming popularity on the licentiouſneſs of his opinions, has aſſigned the reception of Chriſtianity to FIVE CAUSES; *each of which he has repreſented, as in reality unconnected with any divine interpoſition.*

Firſt, "[p] the inflexible and intolerant "zeal of the firſt Chriſtians, derived

[p] Gibbon's Hiſt. of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, p. 536. edit. 4to. 1777.

" from the Jews, but purified from the " unſocial ſpirit, which had deterred " the Gentiles from embracing the law " of Moſes."

Now, zeal which is at once intolerant, and purified from any unſocial ſpirit, is a quality, which we leave it to the ſingularity of this writer to conceive, and to his eloquence to deſcribe.

But we deny the fact, that any kind or any degree of intolerance exiſted among the primitive Chriſtians: and as to their zeal, we maintain that it did not bear the ſlighteſt ſimilitude to the fierceneſs and bigotry of the Jews. It was derived from very different cauſes, and aimed at far nobler ends. It was not the narrow and temporal intereſts of one nation, but the general reformation, and the ſpiritual happineſs of the whole world, which the teachers of Chriſtianity were anxious to promote. That firmneſs, which may be miſcon-

miſconſtrued into intolerance, and that activity, which we are content to call by the name of zeal, had, in the uſual courſe of human affairs, a tendency to retard, rather than to facilitate the propagation of the goſpel. The Chriſtian, inſtead of falling into the faſhionable and popular intercommunity of worſhip, diſdained, amidſt the terrors of impending death, to throw incenſe on the altar of Jupiter: he boldly pronounced the whole ſyſtem of Pagan *mythology impoſture*; and charged the whole ritual of its external devotions, with groveling ſuperſtition, and profane idolatry.

A ſecond Cauſe he finds in "the doc-"trine of a future life." Such a doctrine, doubtleſs, is congenial to the nature of man as an accountable and moral agent; it is repeatedly inſiſted upon in the goſpel, and muſt ultimately, and in a favourable ſtate of things, have increaſed its efficacy. But the future life taught by the Apoſtles had few recommendations

in the ſight of the Heathen world. It was offenſive to the Epicureans by the puniſhments it threatened: it was not attractive to the vulgar by the very rewards which it propoſed. The pride of the philoſopher was ſhocked by the doctrine of a reſurrection, the mode of which he was unable to comprehend: the imaginations of other men were feebly impreſſed by the repreſentation of a future ſtate, which did not hold out the ſerene ſky, the verdant garden, and the luxurious enjoyments of an Elyſium.

A third Cauſe he finds in "the miraculous powers aſcribed to the primitive church;" and then proceeds, in a ſtyle of the moſt contemptuous and bitter deriſion to inſinuate that theſe powers were never poſſeſſed.

Now, the hardieſt adverſaries of the goſpel, a Porphyry, a Celſus, and a Julian, do not deny the exiſtence of thoſe miracles: and Chriſtianity has little to

fear from the improbable cauſes to which theſe writers impute them.

It is, however worthy of remark, that when Chriſtianity was publiſhed, a general prejudice in the people, and a very ſevere ſpirit of ſuſpicion in the government, prevailed againſt the belief of Miracles. They were ſtigmatized by the opprobrious appellation of *Magic*: and Auguſtus, it is well known, had publiſhed very rigorous edicts againſt the whole race of Præſtigiators.

The peculiar difficulties, which obſtructed the reception of Chriſtian miracles have been explained with great acuteneſs of reaſoning, and great depth of erudition, by a modern writer, whoſe remarks defeat indeed the fallacies, but ſeem to have eſcaped the notice of our ingenious and indefatigable hiſtorian.

The ſum of his arguments I will give

his own words. " [q] The multitude of " popular gods admitted amongſt the " Heathens did by neceſſary conſequence " occaſion ſuch a multitude of pretended " miracles, that they inſenſibly *loſt* their " force, and *ſunk* in their eſteem. Though " the philoſophers in general, and men of " reading and contemplation could not " but diſcover the groſſneſs and abſur- " dity of the Civil Religion; yet this " could have little effect on the *Vulgar*, " or *themſelves*: not on the *Vulgar*, be- " cauſe it was the buſineſs of the wiſeſt " and moſt politic heads zealouſly to ſup- " port and encourage them in their prac- " tices; not on *themſelves*, becauſe if " they deſpiſed their Gods they muſt " deſpiſe their Miracles too."

Now, under theſe circumſtances, miracles *aſcribed* to the firſt propagators of Chriſtianity, muſt have created an immediate and ſtubborn prejudice againſt their

[q] Weſton on the Rejection of Chriſtian Miracles by the Heathen, p. 348.

cauſe:

cauſe: and nothing could have ſubdued that prejudice, but miracles really and viſibly performed.

A fourth Cauſe is "the virtues of the firſt Chriſtians;" which are themſelves reduced to a mean and timid repentance for former ſins, and to an impetuous zeal in ſupporting the reputation of the ſect newly embraced.

But ſurely in the eyes of the haughty and jealous Romans, ſuch repentance and ſuch zeal muſt have equally excited oppoſition to Chriſtianity. The firſt would have provoked contempt among perſons of *their daring ſelf-ſufficiency*; and the other would have awakened the jealouſy of the magiſtrate. True it is, that the Chriſtians had virtues of a nobler kind. It is alſo true, that thoſe virtues did ultimately triumph over the ſcorn and malice of their foes: and it is true, that a religion producing ſuch effects on its followers, and deriving ſucceſs from ſuch

means, carries with it a preſumptive proof, of which impoſture never could boaſt.

The laſt ſecondary Cauſe mentioned by this writer, " is the union and diſcipline " of the Chriſtian church."

We acknowledge the force of union in ſecuring the order, and enlarging the intereſts of every ſociety; and we heartily wiſh, that ſuch union could be found in the earlier ages of the goſpel. But the diſtractions and internal diviſions of the Chriſtians preſent a very different proſpect. And if the goſpel ſucceeded, not only amidſt the furious aſſaults of its enemies, but the no leſs violent contentions of its friends, we muſt look for its ſucceſs in ſome other cauſe, than thoſe which our hiſtorian has aſſigned.

Obſervations ſimilar to theſe have been moſt properly produced, and moſt ably enforced by various writers, who have repelled the baſe and diſingenuous aſſaults of this

this moſt dangerous enemy. But in reviewing the circumſtances which attended the propagation of the goſpel, I could not, conſiſtently with the ſpirit of this Inſtitution, avoid taking ſome notice of his treacherous and inſidious endeavours to undermine this important argument for the truth of our faith: nor could I neglect ſo favourable an opportunity as the preſent, of cautioning the younger part of my audience, againſt being unwarily ſeduced into an approbation of his ſentiments, by the inſinuating arts of his ſophiſtry, and the captivating graces of his language.

We are by no means inſenſible to the merits of our hiſtorian; but at the ſame time we know and lament his eagerneſs to throw a veil over the deformities of the Heathen theology, to decorate with all the ſplendor of panegyric the tolerant ſpirit of its votaries, to degrade by diſingenuous inſinuation, or by ſarcaſtic ſatire, the importance of revelation, to exhibit

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in the moſt offenſive features or diſtortion the weakneſſes and the follies of its friends, and to varniſh over the cruelties, and exalt the wiſdom of its mercileſs and unrelenting enemies.

I ſhall now conclude this diſcourſe by briefly enumerating a few particulars, which have been already offered to your conſideration in the courſe of theſe enquiries into the riſe and propagation of Mahometaniſm and Chriſtianity.

It has been already ſhewn, from the expreſs and univerſal teſtimony of hiſtory, that every circumſtance of the times, every particular in the manners and ſituation of mankind, plainly and undeniably concurred to favour the ſucceſs of Mahometan impoſture.

We have now ſeen from the ſame undoubted authority, that the religion of Chriſt, at its firſt appearance in the world, (humanly ſpeaking) laboured under all poſſible diſadvantages; and that every apparent

parent probability was ſtrongly and deciſively againſt its ſucceſs.

The goſpel was not, like the Mahometan impoſture, propoſed to a people rude and uncivilized, or at a time when univerſal ignorance and barbariſm had prepared mankind to receive, without heſitation, any impreſſions from the artful and deſigning; but in an age, which perhaps above all others, was diſtinguiſhed for curious ſpeculation, and philoſophical reſearch. The Roman empire was at that time in its full glory; and a long and profound peace, together with the patronage and encouragement of authority, had contributed to raiſe the arts and ſciences to a height unknown before; and which later ages, with all their boaſted improvements, have ſcarce been able to exceed. At ſuch a period did the religion of Chriſt invite, and endure, the teſt of the ſevereſt ſcrutiny: till, at length, like pure gold, it came forth unſullied, and undiminiſhed from the flames

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We have obſerved that the Arabian impoſtor owed much of his ſucceſs to the artful accommodation of his religion to the ruling paſſions, the favourite opinions, and the inveterate prejudices of his countrymen. But the goſpel preſented itſelf to mankind with a ſeverer and a chaſter aſpect. Far from condeſcending to flatter the appetites and paſſions, it ſtrictly enjoined its followers the hard and unpleaſing taſk of plucking out even the eye and cutting off the hand, that gave occaſion of offence. Far from ſeeking to recommend itſelf to popular favour by complying, and accommodating tenets; it directly and openly oppoſed almoſt every opinion and every prejudice of thoſe to whom it was offered.

The great and powerful principle of national pride, which pleaded ſtrongly in favour of the pretenſions of Mahomet, formed one of the moſt ſtubborn and formidable obſtacles that oppoſed the progreſs of the goſpel.

Called

Called forth to fight the battles of the Lord againſt an unbelieving world, and confident of victory from the promiſe of a divine aſſiſtance for ever at hand, the Arabian beheld in the religion of his warlike prophet the grand and only inſtrument which could raiſe his country from obſcurity to glory, from weakneſs and contempt to power and dominion.

But to the Jewiſh people Chriſtianity preſented no ſuch flattering views. Its grand and fundamental doctrine, faith in an humble, ſuffering Meſſiah, obſcured the brighteſt proſpects, and overthrew the faireſt opinions, which a long and uninterrupted tradition apparently ſupported by prophecy, had taught them to entertain. Their firſt ſtep towards embracing the goſpel, was founded on the ruin of every hope which ambition had inſpired; and previouſly to their converſion, they were called upon for ever to renounce their deareſt expectations of brilliant conqueſts and unbounded dominion under the auſpi-

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cious guidance of a mighty and triumphant deliverer. They could not therefore look but with indignation on the progreſs of a religion, which tended to deprive them of their peculiar privileges and diſtinctions; to confound them again with the maſs of mankind; and to reduce them from that haughty pre-eminence which they had hitherto claimed, to the ſame level with the ſurrounding nations, whom they had been accuſtomed to ſhun with pious abhorrence, or to ſpurn with ſullen contempt.

By an artful intermixture of the favourite ceremonies and fantaſtic rites of Arabian idolatry with the new modes of worſhip, which he enjoined; and by a ſtudied accommodation of his ſtyle and manner to the prevailing paſſion for the language and ornaments of poetry, the ſagacious impoſtor facilitated the reception of his doctrines among his countrymen.

But

But the religion of Jeſus Chriſt could boaſt no ſuch advantages. As it oppoſed the pride, and the prejudices of the Jews, ſo was it equally hoſtile to every prepoſſeſſion of the Gentiles.

To the vulgar, attached as they were to the licentious feſtivals, the ſolemn proceſſions, and the pompous pageantries of heatheniſm, the pure and ſpiritual worſhip of Chriſtianity diſplayed no charms: while the more enlightened among them, enamoured of the ſubtleties of human wiſdom, and bewildered in the mazes of an abſurd and unintelligible philoſophy, were unwilling to believe that the plainneſs and ſimplicity of the goſpel could ever be worthy an omniſcient God.

Laſtly, the goſpel was not, like the impoſture of Mahomet, impoſed upon the ſubject nations by the ſtern command of a conquering tyrant; nor was it for the ſpace of full 300 years, even indirectly

rectly countenanced by any influence of government and authority: on the contrary, we behold with aſtoniſhment, the pomp of adverſe power, no leſs than the pride of learning, and the arrogance of philoſophy, reſiſting its influence by a long and perſevering perſecution, but bowing at length before the plain and artleſs preaching of the poor, the weak, the illiterate fiſhermen of Galilee.

To ſuch ſtupendous effects an adequate cauſe muſt be aſſigned.

A revolution ſo aſtoniſhing, accompliſhed by inſtruments ſo evidently weak and diſproportioned, and under circumſtances ſo adverſe and unfavourable, naturally teaches us to look higher; to elevate our views far above the reach of human ſtrength and wiſdom, even to that Almighty Being, *from whom alone cometh every good and every perfect gift.*

SERMON IV.

JOHN VII. 12.

Some ſaid he is a good Man: others ſaid, Nay, but he deceiveth the People.

THERE is a ſtrong and active curioſity in the human mind, which ever prompts us to enquire into the lives and characters of men, whoſe names have been rendered famous for the extraordinary events of which they have been the inſtruments, and by the important revolutions which they have occaſioned in the world. From the proper and temperate indulgence of this principle, however its exertions may have been ſometimes condemned as uſeleſs and unprofit-

able, many and ſolid advantages may be derived to the cauſe of knowledge and of truth. The connection which ſubſiſts between the hiſtory of every event, and the character of its author, is obvious; they reflect reciprocal light on each other; and it is only by an attentive inveſtigation of both, that we can be enabled to diſcover with certainty the motives which influenced the attempt, and the means by which it was accompliſhed.

But in thoſe ſpeculations of more awful importance, which regard the ſpiritual and eternal welfare of mankind; when we are called upon to examine the pretenſions of thoſe who have laid claim to divine inſpiration, and immediate commiſſion from the Deity; there is not only a propriety, but alſo a neceſſity for enquiring with minuteneſs into the character of perſons, who have aſſumed ſo high and venerable an office. From ſuch an enquiry into the life of the founder may be deduced no mean or indeciſive evidence of the truth

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or falſehood of his religion; and by contemplating his conduct in the different ſituations and circumſtances in which he was placed, we may be enabled to trace plain and unequivocal marks of real or pretended inſpiration; and thus to form our judgment, whether it was obedience to the commands of God, or compliance with the dictates of worldly intereſt, that influenced and directed his actions.

In ſurveying the life of Mahomet, we cannot but obſerve with much ſurpriſe, the oppoſite and contradictory characters under which he has been repreſented by hiſtorians, who from different motives, and with different views, have tranſmitted to poſterity the moſt irreconcileable accounts of the ſame public and memorable events. In the various writings of his numerous followers the character of the prophet is uniformly drawn in the brighteſt and moſt amiable colours; he is held up as the unrivalled pattern of every

mental and corporeal perfection; and as diſtinguiſhed by every quality and virtue which can adorn and elevate human nature. But far different is the portrait which has been generally exhibited of this remarkable perſon by Chriſtian hiſtorians. Struck with horror at the conſequences of his impoſture, they have thought it incumbent on them to ſet no bounds to their hatred of the impoſtor. Hence they have boldly queſtioned his intellectual, as well as his moral faculties: they have repreſented him as not leſs contemptible on account of his abject ſtupidity, than deteſtable for his enormous vices; and language itſelf has ſeemed to labour under the difficulties of expreſſing with ſufficient ſtrength, their ideas of the complicated guilt and baſeneſs of his character. Thus have Chriſtian writers deſcribed the man, whom the greater part of the inhabitants of the Eaſtern world, has, for more than eleven hundred years, blindly revered as the moſt accompliſhed of mortals, and the moſt ſacred of prophets.

phets. But if we would obtain juſt and true notions of this extraordinary character, we muſt equally avoid the enthuſiaſm of the one, and the prejudices of the other; we muſt not admit, but with great limitation, either the undiſtinguiſhing cenſures of his exaſperated oppoſers, or the exaggerated encomiums of his infatuated adherents.

It may be obſerved, that the immoderate and unqualified zeal of Chriſtian writers has often led them into unjuſtifiable extremes, which have injured the cauſe they ſtood forth to defend. Their repreſentations of the impoſtor, by the harſh colouring and diſtorted features, evidently betray the pencil of an enemy. They have ſtudiouſly magnified every vice, and aggravated every circumſtance, which tended in any degree to degrade, or to blacken his character; and where the deſcription ſeemed imperfect, the aid of fiction has been ſometimes called in, to give a ſhade and colouring to the out-lines of

reality and truth. But truth approves not, nor requires ſuch diſingenuous arts for its defence. Even if we admit the moſt favourable character of the pretended prophet, which had been drawn by his enthuſiaſtic followers, objections may ſtill be raiſed to his bold and impious pretenſions; objections too ſtrong, I am confident, for ingenuity to ſolve, or ſophiſtry to elude.

Beſides, it was probably forgotten by theſe warm, though miſtaken defenders of the Chriſtian cauſe, that by thus repreſenting Mahomet as a perfect monſter of ignorance and vice, they have in reality rendered his ſucceſs *little leſs than miraculous; and very difficult at leaſt, if not* abſolutely impoſſible to be accounted for by any human means. The man who could project, and execute with ſucceſs, ſo bold and hazardous an enterprize as that of ſubverting the religious and civil government of his country, and eſtabliſhing in their place a ſyſtem of his own, could

never have been deſpicable for littleneſs of ſpirit, or weakneſs of underſtanding. Reaſon compels us to ſuppoſe, that ſuch an impoſtor, however favoured by circumſtances, muſt doubtleſs have poſſeſſed ſuperior talents, to enable him to deceive his countrymen, to captivate their affections, and to triumph over the external obſtacles that oppoſed him. Nor is it eaſy to conceive, that He could ever have ſupported the ſevere character of the great reformer of mankind, whoſe morals were not ſpecious at leaſt, according to thoſe ideas of morality which prevailed among the people to whom his pretenſions were immediately propoſed. Whatever his real character might have been, whatever the ſecret propenſities of his heart, ſome ſmall ſhare of hypocriſy, ſome little regard to external decorum, muſt have been indiſpenſably requiſite to inſure his ſucceſs.

If we thus arbitrarily diveſt the impoſtor of thoſe qualities and abilities,

which on the ſuppoſition of ordinary and moral cauſes, were eſſentially neceſſary to the accompliſhment of his deſigns, our reaſoning is at once reduced to a manifeſt abſurdity. For, if the natural means of his ſucceſs were wanting, it can only be aſcribed to divine. And thus might the impious, with ſome ſhew of reaſon, accuſe the Almighty of injuſtice and of caprice: of injuſtice, in having by his immediate interpoſition led millions of his creatures into the moſt deplorable error: of caprice, in having in part deſtroyed by violence that revelation, which he had ſix hundred years before controuled the courſe of nature to eſtabliſh by many ſigns, and wonders, and mighty deeds. Let us therefore, inſtead of ſtudying to caſt an unneceſſary gloom over the character of Mahomet, rather chooſe that part to which reaſon and probability incline; and let us admit without reſerve his abilities and his virtues, to the utmoſt extent that, conſiſtently with truth, can poſſibly be allowed to them. Nor let it

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be from hence imagined, that we are animated by any deſire to palliate the vices, or to aggrandize the character of the prophet: ſince under this fair outſide, this ſpecious diſguiſe, we ſhall probably be enabled to point out ſtrong, and indiſputable marks of the moſt infamous impoſture.

Doubtleſs amidſt all the characters of great and extraordinary men, who, in the various ages and nations of the world, have raiſed themſelves by ſuperior talents above the reſt of mankind, and by the force of genius alone have effected the moſt memorable changes in the courſe of human affairs; no one preſents itſelf to the philoſopher as a more curious or intereſting ſubject of inveſtigation than that of the pretended prophet of Arabia.

Animated by an ambition which dared to attempt, and ſupported by abilities which qualified him to conduct the moſt arduous deſigns, we behold him ſuddenly, ſtarting

ſtarting up from the ſhade of obſcurity; projecting with conſummate art, and at length accompliſhing with brilliant ſucceſs a revolution, which from its very nature no leſs than from its important and extenſive conſequences, may be juſtly ranked amongſt the moſt ſtupendous, which hiſtory has recorded. When we conſider the point from which he ſet out, and the height to which he roſe; when we contemplate the greatneſs of that empire, and the extent of that religion which he founded; our aſtoniſhment is excited as well by the ſplendid talents and the profound artifice of the impoſtor, as by the blind compliance and abject credulity of the multitudes whom he deceived.

The circumſtances which attended the earlier years of Mahomet, were certainly ſuch as preſented no flattering proſpects of grandeur, and no probable views of ambition to his future life. Though deſcended from the moſt honourable tribe of Arabia, and from the nobleſt family of

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that tribe, yet diſtreſs and poverty were the only portion which he inherited; a diſtreſs and poverty unſoftened by the tender cares, and kind indulgence, of parental affection.

The education which he received, like that of the reſt of his countrymen, was rough and hardy; neither tempered by the elegancies of literature, nor even enlightened by the firſt and moſt obvious rudiments of knowledge; but calculated rather to invigorate the powers of the body, than to poliſh and enlarge the mind. The bounty of nature, however, and the exquiſite endowment with which ſhe had ſo liberally adorned the future prophet and monarch of Arabia, abundantly compenſated for the unkindneſs of fortune. Graceful in his perſon, eaſy and inſinuating in his manners, and endowed with a greatneſs of mind which could brave the ſtorms of adverſity, and riſe ſuperior to the diſadvantages of an illiterate education; he was in poſſeſſion of accompliſhments

pliſhments more valuable in themſelves, and capable of producing more illuſtrious effects, than all that the influence of wealth, or the authority of hereditary power could have beſtowed.

But if Mahomet, deprived of the uſual means of cultivation and improvement, was, during the earlier years of his life, left ſolely to the guidance of untutored nature; he, at a more advanced age, enjoyed the moſt favourable opportunities of acquiring a ſpecies of information far more conducive to the ſucceſs of his ſubſequent deſigns, than the maxims of ſcience or the refinements of philoſophy; the knowledge, I mean, of men and manners.

Surrounded by a rough and barren territory, which denied to its inhabitants even the neceſſaries of life, the people of Mecca, like the Iſhmaelites their forefathers, depended principally on commerce for ſupport. Thus urged by the call of unavoidable neceſſity, and favoured by a ſituation

ſituation peculiarly advantageous to ſuch purſuits, they carried on a conſtant and extenſive intercourſe with Perſia, Syria, Paleſtine, and Egypt. In theſe employments the impoſtor was early initiated; and during his travels into the neighbouring nations, beſides the general improvement and cultivation of his mind, he collected thoſe particular obſervations which afterwards induced him to form, and acquire that knowledge which enabled him to execute, his daring and ambitious deſigns.

Whilſt yet engaged in the occupations of commerce, and diſcharging with zeal and fidelity the humble duties of ſervitude, his ſtrong and active genius already roſe above the meanneſs and obſcurity of his ſtation; and from a well-grounded confidence in its own powers, inſpired him with an opinion, that he was born to move in a higher and more illuſtrious ſphere. But when a ſudden and unexpected change of fortune had raiſed him

from poverty and dependence to opulence and eaſe, this opinion returned with augmented force; and he now began to meditate ſeriouſly on the means of realizing thoſe ideas, which had hitherto proceeded rather from the warmth of imagination, than from the deliberate dictates of reaſon, or even the impulſes of ſerious and habitual hope.

From this period to the time when he announced his miſſion as the prophet of the moſt High, hiſtory has recorded nothing concerning the actions and the purſuits of Mahomet. Fifteen years of his life are involved in the deepeſt and moſt impenetrable obſcurity. One hiſtorian only informs us, that God had inſpired his prophet with a love of ſolitude and retirement. But in this ſingle information we ſee a ray of light ſufficient to clear up the darkneſs of this myſterious interval. In a lonely cave, in the receſſes of Mount Hara, he ſhunned the ſociety of men.

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Doubtleſs, it was in this ſilence of retirement that the artful impoſtor laid the foundation of his future greatneſs: here he drew the general outlines, and here he adjuſted the ſeveral particulars of that great and hazardous project, which was hereafter to raiſe him to glory and dominion.

At the time when Mahomet travelled into the neighbouring nations, there were ſome peculiar circumſtances in their government and manners, which were calculated to ſtrike the deepeſt impreſſion on a vigorous and reflecting mind. The internal diſtractions of Perſia on the one ſide, and the notorious weakneſs of the Roman provinces on the other, together with the univerſal corruption of manners that prevailed amongſt the inhabitants of both, were indications too ſtrong to be overlooked of the approaching ruin of theſe mighty and unwieldy empires.

But the ſtate of religion was probably the grand and principal object that attracted the attention, and employed the reflections of Mahomet. A little conſideration, and eſpecially an acquaintance with the Jewiſh and Chriſtian doctrines, muſt have convinced him of the abſurdity of that impious idolatry in which he had been educated, and in all the madneſs of which his countrymen were ſtill plunged almoſt univerſally.

In the mean time he beheld the Jews, deſpiſed and deteſted by all men, ſtill obſtinately refuſing to mix with the reſt of mankind, and adhering with unſhaken attachment to the law of Moſes: whilſt the Chriſtians, divided in their faith, and degenerate in their practice, had miſerably perverted the ſpirit of their religion; and forgetting the union and love which it preſcribed, were denouncing anathemas on each other. Senſible of the advantages which he ſhould derive from this confuſed ſtate of affairs, and eagerly ambitious of power,

power, the impoſtor determined to cover his deep and aſpiring ſchemes under the ſpecious veil of divine revelation. Hence, with a boldneſs of deſign which was exceeded only by the cunning that conducted it, he meditated a religion, which by flattering the corrupt paſſions and prejudices of each, might embrace in its ample and comprehenſive law the Chriſtian, the Idolater, and the Jew. The plan was great, and the execution was arduous: but the wily impoſtor facilitated its ſucceſs by laying the foundation of his whole ſyſtem on one plain and obvious principle, which had never been diſputed by either; the belief of one only ſupreme God, the infinite creator of the univerſe, the juſt rewarder of virtue, and the dreadful avenger of guilt. A doctrine thus ſimple, which preſented to reaſon no more than it could eaſily conceive, was apparently well calculated for the reception of all the nations upon earth. But in order to ſtamp the higheſt poſſible ſanction upon the doctrines which he taught, and (what was of

ſtill greater conſequence) to lay the firmeſt foundation on which he might build his own greatneſs and power, the impoſtor ſuperadded the obligation of believing in him as the inſpired prophet and meſſenger of the Almighty.

Having fixed this baſis, he next proceeded to erect upon it a motley and miſſhapen ſuperſtructure, compoſed of the moſt incoherent and heterogeneous materials. In order the more effectually to accompliſh the great object which he had in view, of aggrandizing himſelf by cementing in one ſyſtem the moſt diſcordant opinions of thoſe whom he laboured to ſeduce, he deemed it neceſſary to accommodate his plan, as far as poſſible, to the preconceived notions of all.

With this view he artfully ſelected from the Jewiſh and Chriſtian morality, thoſe parts which ſeemed beſt adapted to the ſentiments and manners of the inhabitants of the warmer climates in particular; blend-

blending them at the ſame time with the popular traditions, the ſuperſtitious ceremonies, and the ruling opinions of his idolatrous countrymen. To have laid claim to a revelation totally new, and independent of any which had preceded it, would have been too bold and hazardous a ſtep: the profound policy of Mahomet therefore ſuggeſted to him a ſafer and more practicable plan. He alledged with much plauſibility, that God had originally given *one grand and univerſal religion to all the ſons of men*: that when the cares and avocations of life had obliterated, or the frailty or perverſeneſs of human nature had corrupted this faith, it had pleaſed the Almighty in his mercy to ſend forth ſucceſſive prophets, to inſtruct and to reform mankind, ever prone to wander from the plain and ſimple paths of truth: Such, amongſt many others whom his own creative imagination raiſed up and dignified with the prophetic office, ſuch was Moſes; whoſe miſſion was by the particular deſignation of providence confined within the

narrow limits of one people: Such too was Jeſus; whoſe more liberal, and comprehenſive ſyſtem, proceeding from a fuller and more perfect exertion of divine goodneſs, was deſtined to confer its benefits, without diſtinction, on all the widely extended race of mankind: Since time, however, had unhappily corrupted the doctrines of Chriſtianity itſelf, and left men once more to wander in darkneſs and in error, it had at length pleaſed the Almighty to elect *HIM* as the inſtrument of his gracious deſigns; to commiſſion him to reſcue religion from the corruptions which obſcured its native ſplendor; and to place him above Jeſus himſelf, by making him the laſt great reſtorer of truth and virtue to the world.

This ſcheme in itſelf appeared fair and plauſible; and the circumſtances of the times were ſuch, as tended in a peculiar degree to countenance and ſupport it. For we cannot but acknowledge, that the almoſt univerſal corruption of the opinions

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and the practice of Christians, the insuperable obstinacy of the Jews, and the impious idolatry of the Arabs, might, to the hasty and superficial observer, seem to render such an interposition of the Deity not unworthy of his benevolence and his justice.

As the Arabians were the more immediate objects of Mahomet's imposture, he deemed it expedient to flatter them in particular with this notion of an early faith once committed to their ancestors: he bade them recollect the sacred names of Abraham and of Ishmael, the venerable founders of their nation; and taught them to regard the doctrines which he proposed to their belief, as nothing more than a restoration of that pure and holy religion, which those favourite patriarchs had professed.

Having thus far matured his great and ambitious project; having thus determined on the most probable means of executing it with success, he thought that he

might now venture to announce his pretended revelation to the world.

The character of Mahomet, according to Eaſtern hiſtorians, had been hitherto preſerved unblemiſhed: his moral qualities, no leſs than his other accompliſhments, had contributed to raiſe him in the eſteem of his fellow-citizens; and his integrity in particular had been honoured with the moſt flattering and diſtinguiſhed teſtimony of their approbation. That he might not, however, by too rapid a tranſition become a reformer of thoſe very errors in which he himſelf had been involved; that he might not too ſuddenly commence a preacher againſt that idolatry which he had practiſed in common with the reſt of his countrymen; and that he might acquire a reputation for ſanctity in ſome meaſure correſpondent with the high and venerable office which he was about to aſſume; he affected to paſs a great part of his time in religious retirement, and holy meditation; he became more grave

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in his deportment, more profuſe in his charities, and more aſſiduous in his devotions.

When the time which he had choſen to announce his miſſion, approached; when the night which was to cover him with glory, according to the expreſſion of Abulfeda, was at length arrived; he withdrew in ſilence to the ſolitary cave, which had been the uſual place of his retirement. Here, he pretended, the divine commands were firſt communicated to him with the moſt awful ſolemnity; and here he received his great commiſſion as the prophet and apoſtle of God, by the hands of Gabriel the glorious meſſenger of the moſt High.

The firſt efforts of the impoſtor were confined to the converſion of his own houſehold. Having ſucceeded thus far, he pretended to receive more frequent communications of the divine will; and proceeded by every ſpecies of artifice, and

by the force of ſuperior talents, to gain over to his party ſome of the moſt powerful inhabitants of Mecca.

After three years thus ſpent in ſecret amidſt various machinations and intrigues, when he could now repoſe full confidence in the blind obedience of his new converts; he at length feigned an expreſs command from heaven to proclaim to the world at large the important office with which he was inveſted, and to exhort his countrymen in particular to forſake the error of their ways, to embrace with ardour the holy religion which he was commiſſioned to reveal to them; and thus to ſave themſelves from that vengeance, which an offended God would moſt aſſuredly execute upon a diſobedient world.

He now began to declaim boldly and openly againſt the reigning idolatry; and that his preaching might produce the greateſt poſſible effect, he omitted no opportunity of awakening the paſſions of his

his hearers: he roused their hopes by his glowing and animated descriptions of the eternal pleasures that adorn the habitation of the faithful: he alarmed their fears by the horrid pictures which he drew of the dreadful torments that were destined to be the portion of unbelievers.

The Christians, indeed, unmasked the designs, and exposed the fallacies of the impostor. The Jews, not perceiving in Mahomet any of those characteristic marks which were to distinguish the glorious Messiah whom they still expected, rejected his pretensions with disdain. The rulers of Mecca, sensible of the danger which threatened a worship, on which all their credit and authority were founded, endeavoured to impede his progress, first by severe and repeated menaces, and at length by actual violence. Even the multitude, on his first public appearance in the character of prophet, ridiculed his pretences, and insulted him with the odi-

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ous appellations of a magician and an impoſtor.

Under circumſtances thus diſcouraging, amidſt the clamours of the unthinking, the ſuſpicions of the unprejudiced, and the abhorrence even of the virtuous, the bold and determined impoſtor remained unmoved. Unſhaken in his purpoſes, and regardleſs of the dangers and difficulties that ſurrounded him, oppoſition, inſtead of damping his courage, or repreſſing his ambition, ſerved only to confirm his reſolution, and to increaſe his activity. Apparently inſenſible to every inſult that was offered, he applied himſelf with unwearied aſſiduity to all ranks and diſtinctions of men. By the charms of his converſation, and by the elegance of his manners, he obtained the favour of the great: he ſought to gain the affections of the poor, by condeſcending to mix with them in all the habits of familiar intercourſe, and by relieving their

diſtreſſes

diſtreſſes with a liberal and unſparing hand: by unremitted endeavours to pleaſe, and by a conſtant exertion of thoſe arts of inſinuation which he ſo eminently poſſeſſed, he gradually conciliated the affections of all.

Thus in defiance of all oppoſition, the exalted genius, the manly and perſuaſive eloquence, the conſummate policy, and the alluring doctrines of the new prophet daily augmented the number of his diſciples.

Compelled, however, at length to eſcape, by a precipitate flight, the laſt deſperate effort of his exaſperated foes; he found a ſecure and advantageous retreat in a place[a] whither his reputation had already reached. Here, by an exertion of the ſame diligence, and by the practice of the ſame artifice, he ſoon found himſelf enabled to collect a conſiderable number of followers, whoſe belief in his miſſion was

[a] Medina.

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firmly eſtabliſhed, and whoſe zeal for the propagation of his religion, and the ſupport of his character as a prophet, was too ſtrong to be ſhaken by any threats of danger or of death.

With increaſing power the impatience and the ambition of the impoſtor alſo increaſed. The view of empire ſeems now to have opened more fully and clearly upon him: and unable to wait for the tedious operation and uncertain effect of argument and of reaſon, he now pretended to have received the divine command to unſheath the ſword of the Almighty, and to ſubdue by the violence of arms, thoſe who had been obſtinately deaf to the voice of perſuaſion.

Mahomet had hitherto acted the darker and more diſguiſed part of the crafty deceiver, and the profound politician; but without neglecting theſe arts, he now began to aſſume alſo another character, and to diſplay the more ſplendid talents of a com-

a commander and a hero. The firſt actions, however, with which he commenced his military career, reſemble the irregular exploits of the robber, more than the ſyſtematical operations of the warrior; and ſeem to have been influenced rather by a rapacious deſire of plunder, than by a pious zeal for the converſion of unbelievers. But enriched by the ſpoils, and aggrandized by the fame of his ſucceſſes, he was ſoon enabled to engage in attempts of greater and more extenſive importance.

The rapidity of his attacks, the ſagacity of his ſtratagems, and the boldneſs of his deſigns, aided by the enthuſiaſtic valour with which he had inſpired his troops, ſoon rendered him ſuperior to his numerous adverſaries. Whilſt the flame of fanaticiſm, which he himſelf had kindled, burnt furiouſly in every breaſt around him, he alone cool and deliberate in the midſt of ſlaughter and confuſion, marked every movement of the enemy,

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took advantage of every error, and left no artifice unemployed to obtain and to ſecure the victory. The conduct of Mahomet towards thoſe whom his arms had conquered, was different under different circumſtances: according as intereſt required, or policy directed, we behold it now diſtinguiſhed by an oſtentation of the moſt heroic clemency, and now ſtained with all the exceſſes of ferocious cruelty. When mild and gentle meaſures ſeemed beſt calculated to conciliate the affections of thoſe whom deſpair might render formidable, we behold him with an air of affected generoſity diſmiſſing thouſands of his captives. When acts of ſeverity appeared expedient, to intimidate the obſtinate, we behold him baſely taking vengeance on the fallen, and with every circumſtance of deliberate and ſavage barbarity, imbruing his hands in the blood of the conquered.

To the ſagacious ſtateſman, and even to the candid philoſopher, Mahomet has ſome-

ſometimes appeared rather ſevere from policy, than cruel by nature. But this apology, in the view of unprejudiced reaſon and of genuine philanthropy, aggravates ſurely the guilt it is meant to extenuate. For the neceſſity which uſurpation creates, the uſurper is always reſponſible: and of him who ſteeps his ſword in the blood of thouſands, who diſdains tamely to ſacrifice their ancient and moſt ſacred rights to lawleſs ambition, *what ſhall we ſay, but that he adds barbarity to injuſtice; that he puniſhes* the ſuppoſed offence which his own outrages had provoked; and executes with calm deliberation thoſe ſchemes of deſtruction, which even the ſudden impetuoſity of paſſion is inſufficient to palliate? A diſpoſition naturally cruel may be corrected by time, or controuled by circumſtances. But when the tender feelings of the heart are overpowered by the ſuggeſtions of the underſtanding; when thoſe ſuggeſtions are adopted from choice, and confirmed by habit; when they ſeize

every opportunity, and ruſh into every extreme; when they call in artificial ſeverity to promote artificial utility, and thus purſue a bad end by the very worſt means; the enormities of ambition become more criminal in their motives, and more pernicious in their effects. Inſtinctive cruelty acts only irregularly and by ſtarts; but a voluntary and ſyſtematic diſregard to the peace of mankind is more conſtant and more terrible in its operations. The former cruſhes only thoſe perſons, who with, or without reaſon, are the objects of reſentment: the latter ſpares not a friend, who appears in the character of a rival; and cruſhes every ſeeming or real obſtacle to its remoteſt views, without diſtinction, and without heſitation. He that is barbarous from nature, may ſometimes be overtaken by compunction, and review his crimes with deteſtation and horror. He that deſtroys his fellow-creatures for the ſake of perſonal advantages ariſing from their deſtruction, not only provides an excuſe for his

outrages,

outrages, but ſanctifies cruelty with the name of wiſdom; and reflects, it may be, upon his ſucceſs with unfeeling indifference, or perhaps with ſavage exultation. The argument alledged in favour of Mahomet unqueſtionably amounts to a ful and deciſive proof, that *Mahometaniſm* itſelf could not have been eſtabliſhed without violence. We readily admit the fact; and we are juſtified in drawing from it ſuch concluſions as are *moſt diſhonourable to the genius of the* religion itſelf, and to the character of its author.

We now paſs on to another ſtriking feature in the character of Mahomet.

His numerous and ſplendid victories were not only the efficacious means of extending his power, and of realizing the hopes which ambition had inſpired; but they were alſo eventually ſubſervient to the gratification of a paſſion leſs generous indeed, though not leſs violent in its im-

pulſes, or leſs forcible in its influence on the human heart. Whilſt the wretched victims of his power were ſacrificed to his cruelty or his policy, a ſtill ſeverer fate awaited the female captive; who was compelled to ſubmit to the baſe and inordinate deſires of a barbarian conqueror, and was forced into thoſe arms which were ſtained with the recent ſlaughter of a friend, a brother, or a parent.

From every view of the life of Mahomet, and even from the partial repreſentations of his zealous and infatuated followers, it is evident that ambition and luſt were the paſſions which divided the empire of his breaſt. From the ſeparate, or united influence of theſe powerful principles, it would not be difficult to trace almoſt every great deſign, and every important action of his life. Hence originated the grand and ſtupendous ſcheme of his impoſture; and hence we obſerve each ſubordinate part throughout its whole contexture, pointing immediately or ultimately

timately to the gratification of one or both of theſe predominant paſſions.

During his earlier years, indeed, every meaſure ſeems to have been dictated, and every inferior conſideration utterly abſorbed by an unvaried attention to the purſuits and the intereſts of ambition. The nature of his undertaking, particularly in its firſt ſtages, required no common degree of prudence and caution. That policy which formed ſo diſtinguiſhing a part of his character, doubtleſs compelled him for a while to conceal, if not to reſtrain, the indulgence of irregular paſſions: leſt the licentiouſneſs of his manners ſhould give offence to thoſe whoſe good opinion it was his object to conciliate; and the immorality of his practice, by betraying the ſecret motives and propenſities of his heart, ſhould unravel the web which his hypocriſy was weaving, before it had acquired ſufficient ſtrength and conſiſtence. Hence, both before, and during the firſt years of his

pretended miſſion, whilſt his daring ſchemes were yet immature, and their ſucceſs uncertain, the artful impoſtor, as we have reaſon to believe, regulated every part of his conduct by the ſtrict rules of external decorum. But no ſooner was his reputation as a prophet eſtabliſhed; no ſooner was his authority rooted too firmly to be ſhaken by any common or ordinary event, and his ambition in ſome meaſure ſatiated by the poſſeſſion of power, than another paſſion aroſe; and ſhaking off the reſtraint which had hitherto ſuppreſſed it, with a violence equally arbitrary, now hurried him away into the wildeſt extravagancies.

At length his attention to the cold and jealous cautions of prudence ceaſed with its neceſſity; and from an affectation of exemplary purity of manners, he now ruſhed into the moſt public and criminal exceſſes of ſenſual indulgence. That addreſs to the carnal appetites, which permitted them ſo liberal an indulgence in the

the preſent life, and promiſed their complete and eternal gratification in another, was one of the moſt alluring ſnares which he ſo ſucceſsfully ſpread to captivate his countrymen. The laws which he preſcribed for the regulation of theſe paſſions, were too looſe for the moſt compliant moraliſt to juſtify.; and too favourable to afford the moſt abandoned ſenſualiſt any probable ground of complaint.

But the boundleſs luſt of Mahomet diſdained to be confined even within the extenſive limits which he had drawn for his followers. It was reaſonable that the prophet ſhould be diſtinguiſhed above the reſt of mankind by excluſive privileges; and that his appetites and paſſions ſhould be indulged with an appropriate and peculiar licence. Sole maſter of the oracles of heaven, he ever compelled them to ſpeak that language, which was beſt adapted to his deſigns. Hence he was poſſeſſed of an unfailing reſource under

every exigency, and thus a ſatisfactory anſwer was always prepared to ſolve every objection, and to remove every ſcruple, which the malice of his enemies, or the pious doubts of his friends might raiſe againſt him. Hence we behold the God of purity himſelf introduced to ſanctify and approve the ſenſual immoralities of his prophet, and to ſilence the murmurs of his profane or ſhort-ſighted followers; who had been weak enough to imagine, that the ſame laws, which were obligatory on the vulgar, likewiſe extended their ſanction to the ſacred and venerable character of the apoſtle.

I will not preſume to ſhock the feelings of this audience by a nearer proſpect of the chamber of the prophet: indeed the moſt abandoned libertine would bluſh at the particular repreſentation of the horrid and diſguſting ſcenes which there unfold themſelves to our aſtoniſhed view. It is therefore ſufficient to obſerve in general, that the retirements of Mahomet, from

from his firſt acquiſition of power to his laſt decline of life, were continually diſgraced by every exceſſive indulgence of that paſſion, which has a more particular tendency to degrade the dignity of the human character even below the brute creation.

That God *heareth not ſinners*, is a dictate of common nature: and doubtleſs to a people who enjoyed a higher degree of civilization, or whoſe ideas of morality were purer and more refined than thoſe of the Arabians at that period, theſe ſtriking blemiſhes in the character of their prophet, would have been ſufficient at leaſt to have excited the ſtrongeſt ſuſpicions againſt his ſincerity, if not abſolutely to have overthrown his pretenſions to a divine communication.

But if the deciſion of the Arabs had been in any degree influenced by uncorrupt reaſon, they would have diſcovered objections equally unanſwerable in other

prominent and diſtinguiſhing features of their great legiſlator.

There is no ſtronger or more infallible criterion of truth and falſehood, than conſiſtency. To ſupport an aſſumed character with perfect uniformity, and to preſerve a regular conſiſtency of conduct under every circumſtance, and in every ſituation of an active and varied life, is a taſk perhaps too hard for the ſagacity of the moſt ſkilful impoſtor to accompliſh. *There are moments, in which the propenſities of nature will ſhew themſelves,* and with irreſiſtible violence, break through every artificial reſtraint which policy may impoſe. Beſides, he who conducts a plan of impoſture, and conſequently whoſe ſucceſs depends ſolely on the machinations of human prudence, is under a neceſſity of accommodating every deſign to external circumſtances: ſo that his conduct will of courſe, be ever found to vary with his ſituation.

Hence

Hence the fierce paſſions of Mahomet, which even in the earlier periods of life, when their influence is moſt powerful, had been compelled to bend to the views of ambition and the dictates of policy, no ſooner felt the immediate danger of indulgence removed, than they impetuouſly tranſgreſſed every reſtraint of decorum, and even boldly bade defiance to the laws of juſtice and the obligations of morality.

Hence, as intereſt required, he now flattered the pride of the Jews, and now appealed to the prejudices of the Arabs: now ſelecting the temple of Jeruſalem, and now that of Mecca, as the hallowed ſpot towards which the worſhip and the prayers of his followers ſhould be directed. Hence too, at the commencement of his impoſture, we find him humble and yielding, labouring only by the powers of eloquence and by the ſofter arts of inſinuation to captivate the affections of his countrymen: but in its more

advanced

advanced ſtate, we behold on a ſudden the preacher, by divine command transformed into the warrior: we ſee his ſteps every where marked with blood and deſolation, and we hear him with the ſtern and ferocious aſpect of a conqueror, propoſing death or converſion as the only alternative to his ſubject foes. Thus in order the more effectually to accompliſh his own baſe and intereſted deſigns, the bold impoſtor ſcrupled not to ſubject even the eternal and immutable counſels of the Almighty to the imputation of weakneſs and inconſtancy.

But of the various diſguiſes under which Mahomet attempted to veil the myſterious plan of his impoſture, none was more artful in its deſign, or more ſucceſsful in its event, than that profound ignorance, and total want of every kind of literature, to which he conſtantly pretended. On this was founded his moſt popular and prevailing argument for the truth of that revelation which he profeſſed to communi-

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cate to the world. The elegant ſtyle of that revelation, the harmony of its ſentences, and the ſublimity of its conceptions were univerſally acknowledged. Was it not then abſurd to imagine (as the impoſtor ſpeciouſly argued) that a work of ſuch extraordinary beauty and excellence, could ever have been compoſed by a man who was deſtitute of every ſpecies of acquired knowledge, and who by his ignorance even of the common rudiments of early education had been precluded from the peruſal of books and the uſe of writing?

To an Arab the argument was irreſiſtible; and even Chriſtian writers, in order to evade its force, have attempted to point out particularly the aſſociates of the impoſtor, whom they imagine to have compoſed that Koran, which he only delivered to the world. That the ignorance of Mahomet was not real, but aſſumed (conſidering the commerce in which he had been engaged, and the intercourſe which

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he had held with the inhabitants of more poliſhed ſtates) might have been reaſonably ſuſpected. But it might alſo have been inferred from proofs of a more direct and poſitive nature. Notwithſtanding all his care and circumſpection, the maſk ſometimes dropped off, and diſcovered at once his real character, and the falſehood of his pretences.

By the confeſſion of his own hiſtorians, there were moments in which his pretended ignorance was forgotten, and he not only expreſſed a deſire to exerciſe, but actually practiſed that very art, of which he ſolemnly and repeatedly profeſſed himſelf to be totally ignorant.

Thus difficult is it, and I might even ſay impoſſible, for the moſt finiſhed and ſagacious hypocrite to preſerve an aſſumed character with perfect and unvaried uniformity. For nothing is permanent but truth, and nothing conſiſtent but ſincerity.

If

If the boundleſs ambition of Mahomet had been ſatisfied with that pre-eminence to which it might have aſpired without a crime; if he had been content to have aſſumed only the character of a legiſlator, and by the ſplendid and aſtoniſhing talents he poſſeſſed, to have civilized his barbarous countrymen, and reclaimed them from idolatry, without the aid of impoſture and the impious pretence of divine revelation; if thus glorious had been the object he purſued, and thus innocent the means, by which he attained it; his vices, enormous as they were, might have been overlooked or forgotten amidſt the ſplendor of his virtues; and we might juſtly have ranked him amongſt the moſt diſtinguiſhed friends and benefactors of mankind.

But in the prophet of God, the great reformer of the world, it is natural to expect a more exemplary purity of manners and a ſtricter adherence to the laws of morality: every claim to an office thus ſacred and venerable excites the ſevereſt

attention, and juſtifies the moſt rigid examination: but from ſuch a teſt the character of Mahomet ſhrinks with guilty apprehenſion; and however we may at firſt view admire the ſpecious virtues and ſplendid abilities that adorned it, yet this admiration is quickly loſt in abhorrence of the baſe and impious purpoſes to which they became ſubſervient.

That the impoſtor by the opinions which he introduced, really improved the manners of the Arabs, cannot perhaps be denied: the religion which he eſtabliſhed, amidſt all its errors and abſurdities, poſſeſſes many principles in common with the true, and is doubtleſs in every reſpect far preferable to that abſurd and monſtrous idolatry which was then the prevailing creed of Arabia. But when we conſider its more extenſive diffuſion and ultimate conſequences; when we reflect on the excellence of that perfect and lovely ſyſtem of doctrine and morals which it threatened to deſtroy, and whoſe benign

influence it ſtill continues fatally to obſtruct; when we call to mind the immenſe multitudes of our fellow-creatures, who are yet involved by its deluſions in the moſt profound darkneſs and error, our opinion concerning him and his impoſture is at once determined, and we behold both in their native features of horrid and almoſt unmixed deformity.

SER-

SERMON V.

II. Cor. IV. 10.

That the Life alſo of Jeſus might be made manifeſt.

HAVING before viewed the life and character of Mahomet, let us now turn our eyes to a brighter picture; where every grace that can recommend religion, and every virtue that can adorn humanity, are ſo blended as to excite our admiration, and engage our love. Independently, indeed, of all compariſon, the character of Jeſus Chriſt ſtands forward as the moſt ſtriking and illuſtrious repreſentation of *whatever things are true, or juſt, or of good report*; and claims our praiſe by its own intrinſic excellence.

In the life of our bleſſed Lord we diſcover nothing that can either create ſuſpicion, or excite averſion; we ſee a thouſand excellencies which the hardieſt enemies of the goſpel are compelled involuntarily to approve. All that negative virtue can ſecure, and all that poſitive merit can attain, appear to have been united with equal luſtre in this lovely and venerable pattern of Chriſtian imitation.

But before I deſcend to the particulars which it may be neceſſary to bring forward in contraſting the life of Chriſt with that of Mahomet, I beg your permiſſion to introduce ſome intereſting, and, I hope, not impertinent reflections on the nature of that hiſtorical form in which the Chriſtian revelation has been tranſmitted to us.

This form involves the correctneſs of ſyſtem without its abſtruſeneſs, and the energy of eloquence without its oſtentation. It happily unites the brightneſs of example

example with the preciſion and perſpicuity of precept. To the minuteneſs of detail which belongs to biography, it adds much of that regular arrangement, and of that vivid colouring, by which the more eminent writers of poetry have endeavoured to mark the diſtinguiſhing and appropriate qualities of their favourite heroes. Inſtead of ſometimes amuſing, and ſometimes aſtoniſhing us, with thoſe brilliant, but indiſtinct and fleeting impreſſions which are excited by general deſcriptions, or elaborate panegyric, it leads us through a ſeries of uniform and characteriſtic actions, into a clear and full knowledge of the agent. It enables, and gently impels the mind to combine by its own operation all the detached inſtances of virtue into one bright aſſemblage. It tranſports the imagination, as it were, into the preſence of the perſon whoſe excellencies are recorded, and gives all the finer ſenſibilities of the ſoul an immediate and warm intereſt in every word and every action. Hence, the manner in which the ſacred writers

have deſcribed the actions of Chriſt, not only increaſes the efficacy of his inſtructions, but conſtitutes a new, a ſtriking, and peculiar ſpecies of evidence for the truth of his religion.

This poſition it may be of uſe for us to illuſtrate yet further.

To compare the character of Socrates with that of Chriſt, is foreign to our preſent purpoſe: but of the manner in which their lives have been reſpectively written, we may properly take ſome notice. On the hiſtory of Socrates then, have been employed the exquiſite taſte of Xenophon, and the ſublime genius of Plato. The virtues of this extraordinary man are ſelected by them as the nobleſt ſubjects for the fulleſt diſplay and moſt active exertion of their talents; and they have brought to the taſk, not merely the ſagacity of philoſophers, but the affection of friends, and the zeal of enthuſiaſts.

Now the different ſtyle of their writings, and the different tempers as well as capacities of the writers themſelves, have produced ſome variety both in the ſcenes in which they have exhibited their maſter and in the opinions which they have aſcribed to him. But in the compoſition of each, Socrates is diſtinguiſhed by a noble contempt of popular prejudice, and perverted ſcience; by an ardent admiration and ſteady purſuit of virtue; by an anxious concern for the moral improvement of his hearers; and by an heroic ſuperiority to the pleaſures of life, and to the terrors of impending death. What his illuſtrious biographers have performed in ſuch a manner as to engage the attention, and excite the admiration of ſucceſſive ages, has been accompliſhed with yet greater ſucceſs by the ſacred writers. They have attained the ſame end under heavier difficulties, and by the aid of means, which if they are conſidered as merely human; muſt ſurely be deemed inadequate to the taſk which they undertook. They were by no means

diſtinguiſhed by literary attainments, or by intellectual powers. Their education could not beſtow on them very exalted or correct ideas of morality; and their writings were deſtitute of every recommendation from the artificial ornaments of ſtyle. Yet have theſe four unlearned men effected by their artleſs ſimplicity a work, to which the talents of the two greateſt writers of antiquity were not more than equal.

They have exhibited a character far more lovely in itſelf, and far more venerable, than fiction has ever painted; and in their mode of exhibiting it, they ſurpaſs the fidelity, the diſtinctneſs, and preciſion, which two of the moſt celebrated writers have been able to preſerve, when exerting the whole powers of their genius, and actuated by the fondeſt attachment, they were endeavouring to do juſtice to the nobleſt pattern of real virtue of which antiquity can boaſt. In Jeſus have the Evangeliſts deſcribed brighter and more numerous virtues, than Socrates is ſaid

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even by his profeſſed admirers to have poſſeſſed. In their deſcriptions they have without effort, and under the influence, it muſt be allowed, of ſincere conviction only, maintained a greater uniformity than the moſt prejudiced reader can diſcover in the beautiful compoſitions of Plato and Xenophon.

If the deſire of communicating their own favourite opinions or the mutual jealouſy of literary fame, be aſſigned as a reaſon for the diverſity of repreſentation in the two Greek writers, we allow the probability of both ſuppoſitions: but we contend, that each of theſe motives is inconſiſtent with that love of truth, which is neceſſary to eſtabliſh the credibility of a biographer. We alſo contend, that the evangeliſts were really poſſeſſed of this excellent quality; that they never deviated from it, in order to indulge their enmity or envy; and that with apparent marks of difference in their language, their diſpoſitions, and perhaps in their abilities,

they have yet exhibited the character of Chriſt the moſt ſtriking, if their narratives be ſeparately conſidered; and the moſt conſiſtent, if they be compared with each other. Be it obſerved too, that the difficulty of preſerving that conſiſtence increaſes both with the peculiarity and magnitude of the excellencies deſcribed, and with the number of the perſons who undertake the office of deſcribing them.

If it be ſaid, that the ſuperior pretenſions of Chriſt, as a divine teacher, required more ſplendid virtues than what are expected from Socrates, who taught morality upon principles of human reaſon only; whence is it that the unpoliſhed, uncultivated minds of the evangeliſts ſhould even conceive a more magnificent character than the imaginations of a Plato, or a Xenophon? What aids did they apparently poſſeſs for repreſenting it more advantageouſly? That thoſe four unlettered men ſhould have drawn ſuch a character,

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with more uniformity in the whole, and with more ſublimity in the parts, is therefore a fact which can be accounted for only, by admitting the conſtant and immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, the real exiſtence of Chriſt's perfection, and the ſtrong and laſting impreſſion they made upon thoſe who converſed with him. Thoſe perfections themſelves were, indeed, extraordinary both in kind and in degree. In their kind they are admirable patterns for the conduct of Chriſt's followers: and in their degree, they are eminently and indiſputably proportioned to the tranſcendent and unrivalled dignity of his own miſſion.

Every reader of diſcernment is diſguſted at the fictitious repreſentation of "thoſe faultleſs monſters which the "world ne'er ſaw;" every writer of taſte finds it neceſſary to procure credit to his repreſentations, by throwing ſome ſhades of error and infirmity over the wiſeſt and beſt of men: every impartial and profound

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enquirer into the conſtitution of the human mind, is aware that the ruling paſſion, by which the moſt amiable and venerable of men are diſtinguiſhed, ſometimes degenerates into exceſs; that the indiſcriminate and eager purſuit of virtue itſelf imperceptibly leads into vice; that the moſt illuſtrious characters are diſtinguiſhed by ſome predominant excellence; that he who ſurpaſſes his fellow-creatures in ſome inſtances, falls below them in others; and that among the ſons of men, no one has yet exiſted, in whom every great and good quality, every religious and ſocial perfection have been at once united.

To theſe incontrovertible and general rules, the life of Chriſt affords one glorious exception. There is a variety in his virtues which never ſhocks probability; and at the ſame time there is an uniformity, which never creates ſatiety. Upon the moſt common actions he beſtows a novelty in his manner of performing them: the uncommon he recommends by a ſimplicity,

plicity, which adds to their charms, without degrading their dignity.

Here, indeed, it becomes me to obſerve, that in all his actions he, without any appearance of deſign, preſerves that decorum which the ancient philoſophers have explained with ſo much ingenuity, and which is utterly beyond the reach of affectation or impoſture. In abſtaining from licentious pleaſures he was equally free from oſtentatious ſingularity, and churliſh ſullenneſs. In partaking, as he ſometimes did, the innocent enjoyments of life, he never fell into the gaiety of the Epicurean; in relinquiſhing them, when the great ends of his miſſion required it, he was equally free from the aſſumed and unnatural inſenſibility of the Stoic. When he complied with the eſtabliſhed ceremonies of his countrymen, that compliance was not accompanied by any marks of bigotry or ſuperſtition: when he oppoſed their rooted prepoſſeſſions, his oppoſition was perfectly exempt from the captious petu-

lance of a controverſialiſt, and the undiſtinguiſhing zeal of an innovator.

It is well known, that ſome virtues owe much of their luſtre to local and temporary circumſtances; and that the ſame actions which may be highly, nay even juſtly extolled in one age or country, are in others ſurveyed with liſtleſs indifference. "In antiquity," ſays an acute obſerver [a], "the heroes of philoſophy, as "well as thoſe of war and patriotiſm, "have a grandeur and force of ſentiment "which aſtoniſhes our narrow ſouls, and "is raſhly conſidered as extravagant and "ſupernatural. They, in their turn, I "allow, would have equal reaſon to con-"ſider as romantic and incredible, the "degree of humanity, clemency, order, "tranquillity, and other ſocial virtues, "to which in the adminiſtration of go-"vernment we have attained in modern "times, had any one been then alive "to have made a fair repreſentation of "them."

[a] Hume's Eſſays.

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The life of Chriſt blends theſe oppoſite and ſeemingly irreconcilcable excellencies. It avoids their extravagance, and ſupplies their defects. The courage of our Lord was active in encountering the dangers to which he was expoſed, and paſſive under the aggravated calamities which the malice of his foes heaped upon him. Yet his fortitude was remote from every appearance of raſhneſs; and his patience was equally exempt from abject puſillanimity and ſtupid apathy. He was firm without obſtinacy, and humble without meanneſs. In the general tenor of his life he was mild and gentle; the promoter of peace amongſt other men, and the ſtricteſt obſerver of it in his own behaviour. But when great and real occaſions called for different deportment, he diſplayed a nobleneſs of mind, a contempt of danger and death, ſuch as the importance of his miſſion required from him, and ſuch as the conſciouſneſs of rectitude could alone inſpire.

To the virtues of Chriſt, whether we conſider them as too ſublime to excite any ſentiments of preſumptuous emulation, or too rational not to juſtify our endeavour to imitate them; whether we examine his private or his public conduct; may in a nobler ſenſe be applied the beautiful and animated language, in which a celebrated orator of antiquity has extolled thoſe arts, by which he was himſelf diſtinguiſhed. "Adoleſcentiam alunt, "ſenectutem oblectant, ſecundas res or-"nant, adverſis perfugium ac ſolatium "præbent, delectant domi, non impe-"diunt foris, pernoctant nobiſcum, pe-"regrinantur, ruſticantur."

Thoſe virtues, indeed, will in no age and no country loſe either their uſefulneſs, their beauty, or their merit. They are in various degrees practicable; under every form of government, whether free or deſpotic; under every modification of manners, whether barbarous or refined; and in every ſtate of knowledge, whether it be

be imperfect or improved. In the lowest condition of the world, they tend to lessen the miseries and disorders to which the unsearchable providence of God has subjected our species: they will increase the stock of our happiness, and exalt our nature to the highest perfection, when accompanied by every assistance which reason, which philosophy and civilization can bestow in forming the moral or the religious character of man.

These observations will, I trust, both elucidate and justify the biographical form in which Revelation is conveyed to us. God, it is true, might have made known to us his will, by a series of laws, by abstract reasonings, by short instructive sentences, by copious and regular systems, or by any of the various modes of human composition. But Christianity aims at a nobler end, and pursues it by the most proper and efficacious methods. We read, indeed the opinions and the belief of Socrates, and the commands and promises

miſes of Mahomet. But by Jeſus Chriſt, virtue of every kind and in every degree, is exemplified as well as taught. He is the pattern as well as the teacher of the duties we are to perform. His precepts ſhew us what we ought to practiſe; his conduct convinces us that it is practicable; and the rewards which he has offered, are powerful incentives to us to practiſe it from the beſt motives, and in the beſt manner. His reſurrection from the grave confirms our faith; his aſcenſion to glory animates our hopes; the actions of his life, and the circumſtances of his death, enlarge and invigorate our charity. By theſe means all the parts of Chriſtianity form one great and conſiſtent whole: every moral rule is realized, and becomes a proof of religious truth; whilſt every religious truth, in its turn, illuſtrates and enforces every moral rule. The actions of God himſelf are, indeed, inviſible; thoſe of men are imperfect; but the actions of Chriſt (conſidered in his human character) are both viſible and perfect;

perfect: they are level to our apprehenſions, and moſt worthy of our imitation.

Religion is thus made intelligible to all, becauſe all are bound to obey it. It is accompanied by a ſpecies of demonſtration, which the meaneſt cannot miſunderſtand; it is recommended by ſuch an inſtance of its beauty and its uſefulneſs, as is calculated to remove every ſcruple, and to ſilence every objection.

To evince the juſtneſs of theſe general obſervations, I ſhall now enter more particularly upon that compariſon between the character of Chriſt and that of Mahomet, to which I am led by the ſubject of theſe lectures.

The ſituation and manners of the Jews at the time when our Lord entered upon his public miniſtry, and the oppoſition to the Goſpel, to which they gave birth, have already been the ſubject of our conſideration. We have ſeen, that of the

many falſe and miſtaken notions which then prevailed among that blind and deluded people, the expectation of a temporal Meſſiah was the moſt extenſive and moſt important. Impatient under the galling yoke of ſervitude, and blindly attached to an opinion, which was at once ſupported by national pride, and in appearance founded on the literal and expreſs authority of divine revelation; the people in general, and the vulgar in particular, were eager to admit, and zealous to defend the claims of every pretender to this ſplendid character. The peculiar nature, and wide-ſpread influence of this prejudice offered the moſt favourable opportunity, and preſented the faireſt proſpect of temporal authority and dominion, which could have been deſired by the moſt ſanguine and ambitious impoſtor. But of this opportunity no advantage was taken by Jeſus Chriſt. The plan which he purſued, was in every reſpect the reverſe of what an intereſted deceiver would have concerted, whoſe hopes of ſucceſs were

were founded only in the machinations of human policy.

His firſt public appearance was in the higheſt degree unpopular, and oppoſed to all the prejudices, and all the pride of his countrymen. Inſtead of alluring them by the proſpect of temporal dominion, to which their hopes and expectations univerſally pointed, he proclaimed the commencement of a ſpiritual and inviſible kingdom, little calculated to attract the attention of a people who had never been accuſtomed to raiſe their views beyond the objects of ſenſe; and totally inconſiſtent with every opinion which had been tranſmitted to them by tradition, and ſanctified among them by authority. Inſtead of erecting his victorious ſtandard as the glorious redeemer of Iſrael, their mighty deliverer from the diſgraceful bondage of Roman oppreſſion, and from the power of every earthly foe; he offered them a redemption, more beneficial indeed, though leſs attractive to the ſenſual mind;

a redemption from the dreadful tyranny of death. He invited them to a deliverance greater in itſelf, though leſs conſonant to their wiſhes, than exemption from ſervitude to the Roman power; a deliverance from the yet ſeverer and more ignominious ſlavery of ſin.

Had intereſt, or ambition, been the guide of his actions, he would certainly have aſſumed that character, to which the warmeſt hopes and the moſt rooted prepoſſeſſions of the Jews univerſally inclined. He would not have oppoſed alike the pride of princes, and the ſuperſtition of the people; he would have either courted popularity, or graſped at dominion; he, at leaſt, would not have taken every meaſure, that had a natural tendency to alarm the jealouſy of the magiſtrate, and to provoke the diſpleaſure of the multitude.

As ambition had no ſhare in his claims, as his kingdom was neither formed on the

the policy, nor ſupported by the power of the world, he ſought not its favour, nor ſhrunk from its diſpleaſure. Inſtead of labouring to increaſe the number of his followers, by an inſinuating flexibility in his own manners, or by a corrupt compliance with their prejudices, he gave offence by the unaffected plainneſs of the one, and by an undiſguiſed oppoſition to the other. He diſdained to conciliate the affections of any claſs of men, however dignified by their ſtation, or formidable for their power, by any baſe or diſhonourable conceſſions: he did not endeavour to win even their aſſent by a ſervile or a treacherous accommodation of his doctrines to their follies, or their vices. At the ſame time he oppoſed thoſe vices, not with the indiſcriminate rage of a blind enthuſiaſt; but with the ſteady reſolution of a wiſe and upright mind, that mixed zeal with knowledge, and added conviction to authority. Even by the confeſſion of his enemies, [b] *he was true, and*

[b] Matt. xxii. 16.

taught the way of God in truth, neither cared he for any man: for he regarded not the perſons of men.

A conduct like this was utterly inconſiſtent with the intricate wiles of policy, or the aſpiring views of ambition. Far from engaging in the purſuit of ſecular power and authority, the bleſſed Jeſus repeatedly, and peremptorily rejected them when offered to his hands. He diſclaimed the office of a ruler or a judge; he even fled from the infatuated multitude, who acknowledged him for their king, and would have exalted him to a throne.

The impoſtor of Arabia ſeized the ſceptre, before it was offered to him; the dictator of Rome rejected a crown, which it was both unſafe and diſhonourable for him to wear; and was conſcious, that he had already obtained the ſolid power of monarchy, while he reluctantly, though oſtentatiouſly refuſed its gaudy appendages.

ges. But far different was the conduct of Jeſus Chriſt. He declined as well the reality of dominion, which Cæſar poſſeſſed, as the appearance of it which Mahomet aſſumed. He declined them, at a time when by accepting them, he might have gratified the pride of his countrymen, ſubdued all the prejudices which obſtructed the belief of his miſſion, and averted many of the dangers which threatened his life.

Thoſe miſtaken views of temporal grandeur, which the diſciples had indulged, their maſter induſtriouſly corrected; he ſought on every occaſion to humble their pride, to draw off their attention from the things of this world, and to fix them on thoſe above.

Men, who ſet no value on any intereſts but thoſe which were connected with honour, wealth, and pleaſure, contemned the humility of his appearance; and derided the plainneſs of his preaching. Their

pride disdained all association with a person ignobly born, who pursued no measures to exalt himself above the common rank of life. Hence, with an immediate view to that humble appearance which he condescended to assume on earth, the prophet Isaiah thus beautifully delineates his character. [c] *He shall grow up, as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form, nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him. He was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Even his numerous and stupendous miracles were not wrought through ostentation, or with any view to serve the purposes of human glory. On the contrary, they were acts of the purest and most disinterested benevolence. They have a kind of ethical excellence, a close

[c] Isaiah liii. 2, 3.

and

and ſtriking conformity to the peculiar temper, as well as the diſtinguiſhing and important miſſion of him, by whom they were performed.

He often enjoined the ſtricteſt ſecrecy to thoſe who were ſpectators of theſe mighty works; leſt he ſhould appear to affect more than to deſerve the high character he ſuſtained. [d] *Go thy way, tell no man*, was his frequent command to thoſe whom he had reſcued from the ſharp anguiſh of diſeaſe, the gloomy horrors of blindneſs, or the agonizing diſtractions of demoniac phrenzy.

From a ſimilar principle aroſe his condeſcenſion in admitting little children to his arms, in bleſſing them and recommending them to the protection of his heavenly Father, and to the tender affections of his diſciples. From the ſame principle, he vouchſafed to waſh his diſciples' feet; and by ſo amiable an inſtance

[d] Matt. viii. 4. Mark viii. 26. Luke viii. 56.

of

of humility inculcated this gracious leſſon, that no office of benevolent aſſiſtance ſhould be thought contemptible, or unworthy even the dignity of the moſt exalted character, if thereby a friend may be relieved in pain, or a fellow-creature extricated from diſtreſs.

Now if his humility had been only affected, in order to cover deſigns of which ambition was the hidden motive, there would have been ſome unguarded moment when the maſk would have dropped off. But the whole life of our bleſſed Lord, in all its viciſſitudes, is marked by the ſame calm indifference to worldly honours, the ſame manly diſregard of popular applauſe, the ſame exemption from the impatience of deſire when pre-eminence was offered to him, and from the anguiſh of diſappointment when it was refuſed.

As the conduct of Chriſt was not actuated by ambition, ſo neither was it influenced

fluenced by any other baſe and inordinate paſſion. He did not make his doctrine ſubſervient to the gratification of any darling luſts and corrupt affections in himſelf, or his diſciples: on the contrary, he conſtantly enjoined the practice of the pureſt, the ſtricteſt, and the moſt refined chaſtity; not only in outward actions, but even in the inward imaginations of the heart. He boaſted of no excluſive privileges, nor claimed any invidious exceptions from the laws which he had preſcribed to others. He allowed no licentiouſneſs under the pretence of religion; and tranſgreſſed no rules of decency or of rectitude, under the arrogated ſanction of the Divinity.

Though poſſeſſed of the moſt unbounded power, we behold him living continually in a ſtate of voluntary humiliation and poverty; we ſee him daily expoſed to almoſt every ſpecies of want and diſtreſs; afflicted without a comforter, perſecuted without a protector, and wandering about, accord-

according to his own pathetic complaint, becauſe he *had not where to lay his head.*

Though regardleſs of the pleaſures, and ſometimes deſtitute of the comforts of life, he never provokes our diſguſt by the ſourneſs of the miſanthrope; or our contempt, by the inactivity of the recluſe. He never affected gloomy auſterity; nor ſought to be ſequeſtered from the world, in order to preſerve the ſpirituality of his mind. But his miniſtry was profeſſedly, and really, deſtined to active employment; and engaged in promoting the nobleſt intereſts of mankind. He therefore freely mixed with them in all the habits of ſocial intercourſe: and in thoſe moments, when all the avenues of the heart are open to gaiety and affection, he ſilently inſtructed his companions in the rare, but exquiſite art of being chearful without levity, and of uniting ſolid improvement with harmleſs entertainment. Socrates converſed familiarly with the impious and the licentious, for the ſake of correcting more effectually their

their errors, and reſtraining their vices; but his reaſonings are ſometimes unneceſſarily abſtruſe, ſometimes paradoxical, and very often indeciſive: and in his behaviour inſtances may be found where his gaiety degenerates into buffoonery, and his irony into bitter and indecent ſarcaſm. Jeſus deigned to aſſociate with publicans and ſinners; but he always preſerved an exact decorum in word and deed; and even in his moſt familiar converſations he ſteadily kept in view the momentous end for which he came into the world.

His attention to their welfare was evidenced not only by his ſalutary injunctions, which breathed the full and genuine ſpirit of compaſſion and love; but by his readineſs to embrace every opportunity of relieving their diſtreſſes, and adminiſtering to their wants. He was, therefore, in a literal, as well as a metaphorical ſenſe, [e] *eyes to the blind; feet was he to the lame;*

[e] Job xxix. 15, 13.

and the bleſſings of them that were ready to periſh, came upon him. In every period and circumſtance of his life, we thus behold dignity and elevation blended with love and pity: ſomething, which, though it awakens our admiration, yet attracts our confidence. We ſee power; but it is a power which is rather our ſecurity than our dread; a power ſoftened by tenderneſs, and ſoothing, while it awes.

And yet with all the gentleneſs of a meek and lowly mind, we behold an heroic firmneſs, which no terrors could ſhake, and no oppoſition could reſtrain. This union of oppoſite qualities conſtitutes, indeed, the diſtinguiſhing beauty of his character. It preſents us, as it were, with the lights and ſhades, which, mixed in due proportion, contribute to the finiſhing of the picture. Had his actions been governed only by the ſoft and yielding influences of gentleneſs and compaſſion, he never could have completed a work, which called for the moſt determined ef-

forts of active zeal and fortitude. Beſides this deficiency in point of poſitive exertion, his conduct, if wholly guided by the gentler principles of the human heart, would have ſubjected him to the ſuſpicion of a blind and irrational impulſe: it would have been imputed to a complexional felicity of temper, a mere inſtinctive benevolence; which having no moral motive, could be entitled to no praiſe; and which being deſtitute of a ſteady principle, would prove of little benefit to mankind. The conduct of our bleſſed Lord was, therefore, guided by reaſon as well as by affection; and was diſtinguiſhed as much by an heroic zeal for the truth, and an unrelenting oppoſition to the errors and wickedneſs of the times, as by the gentler qualities of meekneſs, compaſſion, and forbearance.

That the character ſuſtained by our Lord was not aſſumed, that he was in reality and truth what he appeared to be,

is evident from the perfect conſiſtency of his conduct.

In the exemplary uniformity of Cato's behaviour, we ſee the cauſe of that ſplendid panegyric which the hiſtorian has beſtowed on him: "[f] Eſſe, quam videri, "bonus malebat." Now, on this very principle we aſſert the ſincerity of Chriſt; becauſe, in every period of his hiſtory we find that he never ſwerves from moral rectitude, nor ſinks below the dignity of his religious character. In the private ſcenes of life, and in the public occupations of his miniſtry: whether the object of admiration or of ridicule, of love or of perſecution; whether welcomed with hoſannas, or inſulted with anathemas; we ſtill ſee him purſuing with unwearied conſtancy the ſame end, and preſerving the ſame integrity of life and manners.

To exemplify theſe extraordinary qualities and virtues in the actions of that

[f] Salluſt. Bell. Catil.

life

life which they adorned, is a taſk from which I retire with awful diffidence.

Some of the brighteſt characters which poetry has feigned, or hiſtory has recorded, become more pleaſing and more intereſting to us from the contraſt of their weakneſſes and excellencies in different ſituations, or from the mixture of both in the ſame action. But the life of Chriſt has none of thoſe inequalities, which it is the delight of the orator to paint, and of the philoſopher to analyze. The natural and unaffected deportment which he invariably preſerved, without painful exertion, and without inſidious deſign; the conſiſtence between each particular action and each particular ſituation; the conformity of all his actions to one common rule, the word of God; and their tendency to one common end, the ſalvation of mankind; may be explored by the profound moraliſt, muſt be admired by the pious believer, but cannot be deſcribed, ſurely, without a portion of that matchleſs ſimplicity, with

which they are recorded by the inſpired evangeliſts. Too plain for ornament, and too grand for illuſtration, the character of Jeſus leaves at a diſtance the powers of language. Surrounded with the meaneſt circumſtances, and at the ſame time diſtinguiſhed by the moſt important and aſtoniſhing events, it ſeems to baffle equally, by its humility, and its majeſty, all the feeble efforts of human eloquence.

The birth of our Saviour, placed in the lowlieſt ſcene of poverty, was firſt announced to the ſhepherds, watching their flocks: but the meſſage was brought by an angel, and a multitude of the heavenly hoſt. Though he was laid in a manger in deſpiſed Bethlehem, the Magi of the Eaſt were conducted by a ſtar to viſit the humble ſpot. Sprung, as he was, from the meaneſt origin, and educated in the meaneſt occupation; yet to him was committed the care of immortal ſouls, and the ſalvation of a corrupt and deluded world. His aſſociates he had called from the

pooreſt and moſt ignorant of the people; them, however, did he commiſſion to publiſh the doctrines of faith; and on them the Holy Ghoſt deſcended. Though a friendleſs wanderer, in his own country an exile and an outcaſt, he was diſtinguiſhed whitherſoever he went, by ſigns and miracles. Even in his laſt hour, when he was numbered with maleſactors on the croſs; the darkneſs which overſpread the land, the rending of rocks, the opening of graves, and all the convulſions, as it were, of ſympathizing nature, gave tokens of the Son of God.

Conſidered then in all its circumſtances, the hiſtory of Chriſt ſhrinks not from compariſon with the moſt partial and lofty repreſentation of the prophet of Arabia.

Of both we find, that the earlier part of life, before the publication of their reſpective miſſions, paſſed away in ſilence, private and undiſtinguiſhed. The firſt

years of Mahomet were buſied in the cares of merchandize; till returning to his native city, he devoted to ſolitude and retirement the leiſure which his opulence had procured. The youth of Jeſus was ſpent in domeſtic privacy, and was remarkable only for affectionate and dutiful ſubmiſſion to his parents: unleſs, indeed, when in the temple, he by his ready anſwers to the queſtions of the Rabbins, and his ſkilful expoſition of the ſcriptures, aſtoniſhed thoſe that heard him, and gave an omen of his future greatneſs.

The deſigns of Mahomet were gradually and cautiouſly unfolded; and in order to prepare the minds of his countrymen for the reception of his faith, he firſt artfully perſuaded his own relations and domeſtics, and drew to his ſide the moſt powerful of his neighbours.

Jeſus walked forth by the ſea of Galilee, and ſaw fiſhers caſting their nets. Theſe were his firſt converts and diſciples.

Though they were deſtitute of riches and of power, he found in them what his miniſtry required, an honeſt and a willing ſpirit. He won them neither by ſubtle arguments, nor crafty perſuaſions; but bade them forſake their nets and follow him, to ſee his humble dwelling, to hear his heavenly diſcourſes to the people, and witneſs the wonders he was going to perform.

Jeſus called his hearers to repentance, but Mahomet to conqueſt.

At their firſt appearance they were both compelled to avoid the rage of the multitude, who would have deſtroyed them: but Mahomet eſcaped by a ſecret, ignominious flight, and Jeſus by a public miracle.

The revelation of the Arabian prophet was inconſiſtent; a ſyſtem of contradiction, continually ſhifting with the views of his policy, and the neceſſities of his impoſture; now looking towards Mecca,

and now to Jeruſalem. Widely different was the conduct of Chriſt. He did not ſeek to accommodate his doctrine to fortuitous changes in his external circumſtances; he did not at one time revoke what he had aſſerted, or contradict what he had enjoined, at another. Every part of his teaching was regular and conſiſtent in the objects to which it was directed, and the language in which it was conveyed.

Mahomet allured his followers with the glories of a viſible monarchy, and the ſplendor of temporal dominion. In him we behold the lord of war, and the deſtroyer of mankind, riding in triumph over the ſpoils of thouſands who fell by his deſolating ſword; laying cities in flames; carrying miſery and bloodſhed through the earth; and purſued in his victorious career by the lamentations and curſes of its inhabitants. In Jeſus we ſee the adorable prince of peace, the friend and ſaviour of the world, riding meekly to the holy City,

City, hailed with the acclamations and bleſſings of much people, whom he had reſcued from ſin and death, wiping the tears from all eyes, and healing every ſickneſs and every diſeaſe.

And here the compariſon muſt ceaſe. The events that followed in our Saviour's life are too auguſt to be placed in competition with any mortal power, and can be comprehended only by minds habituated to the contemplation of heavenly objects. Let us conſider the paſſion of our Lord, and the magnificent ſcenes of his reſurrection and aſcenſion; and then aſk, in what part of all the hiſtory of Mahometaniſm any parallel or reſemblance can be found? Let us conſider the laſt days of Chriſt's continuance upon earth, and how does the prophet of Mecca ſink in the compariſon? Let us in imagination hear and ſee the bleſſed Jeſus, when he gives his Apoſtles authority to go forth and baptize all nations, and preach in his name repentance and remiſſion of ſins; when

he empowers them to caſt out evil ſpirits, to ſpeak with new tongues, and to work wonders; when he holds up to them the promiſe of the comforter, and power from on high; and when, having bleſſed them, he aſcends into heaven, where he is for ever ſeated in glory on the right hand of God.

But chiefly, what raiſes Chriſt and his religion far above all the fictions of Mahomet, is that awful alternative of hopes and fears, that looking for of judgment, which our Chriſtian faith ſets before us.

At that day, when time the great arbiter of truth and falſehood, ſhall bring to paſs the accompliſhment of the ages, and the Son of God ſhall make his enemies his footſtool; then ſhall the deluded followers of the great impoſtor, diſappointed of the expected interceſſion of their prophet, ſtand trembling and diſmayed at the approach of the glorified Meſſiah.

Then

Then ſhall they ſay, Yonder cometh in the clouds that Jeſus, whoſe religion we laboured to deſtroy, whoſe temples we profaned, whoſe ſervants and followers we cruelly oppreſſed! Behold he cometh: but no longer the humble ſon of Mary, no longer a mere mortal prophet, the equal of Abraham and of Moſes, as that deceiver taught us; but the everlaſting Son of the everlaſting Father! The Judge of mankind! The Sovereign of Angels! The Lord of all things both in earth and heaven!

SERMON VI.

I. KINGS XIII. 18.

He ſaid— I am a Prophet alſo—and an Angel ſpake to me by the Word of the Lord. But he lied—

IN the days of man's innocence, while he was yet but little lower than the angels, he converſed with God without ſhame or terror, face to face. But when, by his fatal tranſgreſſion, he had fallen from that happineſs in which he was created, he was excluded from this exalted intercourſe; and the Deity appointed beings of an intermediate rank between himſelf and mankind, to diſpenſe his favours and to reveal his will to his degraded

degraded creature. After the tranſgreſſion of Adam, he no longer converſed familiarly with the ſons of men. Moſes only was permitted to approach his preſence, to converſe immediately with the Moſt High, and to behold from the cleft of the rock a ſmall portion of the divine glory paſſing by.

Various were the methods by which the Almighty condeſcended to make known his will to his people. Uſually indeed he ſpake in dreams and viſions: but the more ſolemn manner in which he choſe to inſtruct mankind, was by employing the miniſtration of angels; who were occaſionally ſent to deliver the divine commands, and to diſcloſe the hidden events of futurity to the patriarchs and prophets.

Of theſe divine meſſengers Gabriel alone is expreſly named in the canonical ſcriptures. He was the favoured miniſter, who was commiſſioned to ſhew to

Daniel

Daniel the reſtoration of Jeruſalem, the fate of monarchies, and thoſe mighty events that were deſtined to *make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs, and to ſeal up the viſion and prophecy.* By him the birth of the Baptiſt was foretold to Zecharias; and by him the incarnation of the Meſſiah was announced to the Holy Virgin.

A name ſo diſtinguiſhed, the impoſtor Mahomet juſtly conceived, would be propitious to his deſigns: accordingly he pretended that his own revelations were tranſmitted to him from heaven by the miniſtration of the ſame angel.

To enter into a philoſophical enquiry concerning the interpoſition of ſpirits in the affairs of men, is on the preſent occaſion totally unneceſſary. The fact involves no impoſſibility; and till the relation in which this world may ſtand to the great ſyſtem of the univerſe be fully and diſtinctly known, who ſhall dare to affirm

affirm that the actions of men are unknown or indifferent to moral and rational agents, who are endowed with nobler capacities, and employed in a more extenſive ſphere?

To metaphyſical ſubtleties, which reſt on gratuitous and arbitrary aſſumption, it is ſufficient then to oppoſe the general and uniform belief of all ages, whether dark or enlightened, and of all countries, whether barbarous or civilized: but in the preſent enquiry we ſhall conſider the interpoſition of angels only in an hiſtorical point of view, and ſhall diſpute the pretenſions of Mahomet on a principle which is equally admitted by the believers both of the Koran and of the Goſpel.

As the pretended intercourſe of Mahomet with the angel Gabriel reſts ſolely on the ſuſpicious authority of his own aſſertion, his pretenſions will not admit of any ſerious attack or any plauſible

ible defence. But when he affirms that this divine meſſenger communicated to him revelations ſo inimitably ſublime and beautiful, that they could not have proceeded from any created being; when he defies both men and genii to produce any compoſition that ſhould bear the leaſt reſemblance to his boaſted Koran; when he boldly propoſes it to the teſt of the ſevereſt examination, and holds it out to the admiration of the whole world as a tablet inſcribed in legible characters by the finger of the Deity, then we have ſome opportunity for enquiry and ſome foundation for argument.

Admitting, what can never be proved, this new hypotheſis, that any compoſition may be ſo perfect as to tranſcend the powers of man, and riſe to our ideas of a miracle; yet we peremptorily deny the concluſion, thus applied from it to the Koran. His infatuated followers regarded it as ſomething too wonderful to be the work of one who profeſſed himſelf

ſelf to be both unlearned and ignorant: and the impoſtor himſelf declared it ſuperior to the utmoſt reach of the moſt enlightened and cultivated mind.

If to confident aſſertions implicit belief were due, we might aſſent to each of theſe opinions: but if we turn our eyes, firſt upon the life of Mahomet (which we have already reviewed) and then on his Koran, which remains to be conſidered, we ſhall ſee no reaſon either to glow with the raptures of the Muſſelman, or to re-echo the boaſts of the prophet.

By the advocates of Mahometaniſm, the Koran has always been held forth as the greateſt of miracles, and equally ſtupendous with the act of raiſing the dead. The miracles of Moſes and Jeſus, they ſay, were tranſient and temporary; but that of the Koran is permanent and perpetual; and therefore far ſurpaſſes all the miraculous events of preceding ages.

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We will not detract from the real merit of the Koran: we allow it to be generally elegant, and often ſublime; but at the ſame time we reject with diſdain its arrogant pretence to any thing ſupernatural. As we before diſcovered the ſuppoſed ignorance of the author to be no other than an artful diſguiſe which he aſſumed, to carry on more effectually his fraudulent deſigns; we ſhall now as readily be convinced, that all the real excellence of the work is to be referred to natural and viſible cauſes.

When the Arabs adopted the religion of Mahomet, all ſuſpicions of his ſincerity were loſt in exultation at his ſucceſs, and admiration of his character.

They did not pauſe to examine any abſtract queſtion on the conſiſtence of his pretended revelations. A bright and prominent example ſtood before them, which overwhelmed them with tumultuous amazement and faſcinated them into the

moſt implicit confidence. His triumphs over enemies were conſidered as the moſt brilliant acquiſitions to their national glory: and in the dexterity of his contrivance and the vigour of his execution they ſaw the ſublime features of the hero of their country. His claims to a divine commiſſion, attended with an exterior ſanctity of demeanour, and ſupported by a long and ſplendid ſeries of victories, confirmed them in their veneration for an inſtructor ſo eminently favoured, it ſhould ſeem, by the interpoſition of heaven itſelf.

A confidence thus ſeemingly deſerved, and thus liberally beſtowed would naturally lead the followers of Mahomet, to overlook every imperfection, to enhance every excellence, to confound the ſeeming with the real, and to yield to the pretenſions of the prophet the implicit ſubmiſſion they had already paid to the ſuperiority of the warrior.

Under

Under ſuch impreſſions of admiration and aſtoniſhment, what could the uninformed Arabian oppoſe to the claim of divine inſpiration? Or while ſharing in the glory of his arms, how pauſe to inveſtigate the truth of thoſe pretenſions, which while they exalted his leader to communion with God, ſeemed to ſhed a portion of the ſame ſanctity on his followers and friends.

In the language of Arabia alſo, a language extremely loved, and diligently cultivated by the people to whom it was vernacular, Mahomet found advantages which were never enjoyed by any former or ſucceeding impoſtor. It requires not the eye of a philoſopher to diſcover in every ſoil and country a principle of national pride: and if we look back for many ages on the hiſtory of the Arabians, we ſhall eaſily perceive that pride among them, invariably to have conſiſted in the knowledge and improvement of their native language. The Arabic which

has been juſtly eſteemed the moſt copious of the Eaſtern tongues; which had exiſted from the remoteſt antiquity; which had been embelliſhed by numberleſs poets, and refined by the conſtant exerciſe of the natives; was the moſt ſucceſsful inſtrument which Mahomet employed in planting his new religion among them. Admirably adapted by its unrivalled harmony; and by its endleſs variety to add painting to expreſſion, and to purſue the imagination in its unbounded flight; it became in the hands of Mahomet an irreſiſtible charm to blind the judgment, and to captivate the fancy of his followers.

Of that deſcription of men, who firſt compoſed the adherents of Mahomet, and to whom the Koran was addreſſed, few, probably, were able to paſs a very accurate judgment on the propriety of the ſentiments, or on the beauties of the diction: but all could judge of the military abilities of their leader; and in the

midſt of their admiration it is not difficult to conceive, that they would aſcribe to his compoſitions every imaginary beauty of inſpired language.

The ſhepherd and the ſoldier, though awake to the charms of thoſe wild but beautiful compoſitions, in which were celebrated their favourite occupations of love or war, were yet little able to criticiſe any other works, than thoſe which were addreſſed to the imagination, or the heart. To abſtract reaſonings on the attributes and the diſpenſations of the Deity, to the comparative excellencies of rival religions, to the conſiſtency of any one religious ſyſtem in all its parts, and to the force of its various proofs, they were quite inattentive. In ſuch a ſituation the appearance of a work, which poſſeſſed ſomething like wiſdom and conſiſtence; which preſcribed the rules, and illuſtrated the duties of life; and which contained the principles of a new, and comparatively ſublime theology; inde-

pendently of its real and permanent merit, was likely to excite their aſtoniſhment, and to become the ſtandard of future compoſition.

In the firſt periods of the literature of every country, ſomething of this kind has happened. The father of Grecian poetry very obviouſly influenced the taſte and imitation of his countrymen. The modern nations of Europe all poſſeſs ſome original author, who riſing from the darkneſs of former ages, has begun the career of compoſition, and tinctured with the character of his own imagination the ſtream which has flowed through his poſterity.

But the prophet of Arabia had in this reſpect advantages peculiar to himſelf. His compoſitions were not to his followers the works of man, but the genuine language of Heaven which had ſent him. They were not confined therefore to that admiration, which is ſo liberally beſtowed

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on the earlieſt productions of genius; or to that fond attachment with which men every where regard the original compoſitions of their country: but with their admiration they blended their piety. To know and to feel the beauties of the Koran, was in ſome reſpect to ſhare in the temper of heaven; and he who was moſt affected with admiration in the peruſal of its beauties, ſeemed moſt fitly the object of that mercy, which had given it to ignorant man. The Koran, therefore, became naturally and neceſſarily the ſtandard of taſte. With a language thus hallowed in their imaginations, they were too well ſatisfied, either to diſpute its elegance, or improve its ſtructure. In ſucceeding ages the additional ſanction of antiquity, or preſcription, was given to thoſe compoſitions which their fathers had admired: and while the belief of its divine original continues, that admiration which has thus become the teſt and the duty of the faithful, can neither be altered nor diminiſhed.

When therefore we conſider theſe peculiar advantages of the Koran, we have no reaſon to be ſurpriſed at the admiration in which it is held. But, if deſcending to a more minute inveſtigation of it, we conſider its perpetual inconſiſtence and abſurdity, we ſhall indeed have cauſe for aſtoniſhment at that weakneſs of humanity, which could ever have received ſuch compoſitions as the work of the Deity.

The firſt praiſe of all the productions of genius, is invention; that quality of the mind, which by the extent and quickneſs of its views, is capable of the largeſt conceptions, and of forming new combinations of objects the moſt diſtant and unuſual. But the Koran bears little impreſſion of this tranſcendent character. Its materials are wholly borrowed from the Jewiſh and Chriſtian ſcriptures, from the Talmudical legends and apocryphal goſpels then current in the Eaſt, and from the traditions and fables which abounded

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in Arabia. The materials collected from theſe ſeveral ſources, are here heaped together, with perpetual and needleſs repetitions, without any ſettled principle or viſible connection.

When a great part of the life of Mahomet had been ſpent in preparatory meditation on the ſyſtem he was about to eſtabliſh, its chapters were dealt out ſlowly and ſeparately during the long period of three and twenty years. Yet thus defective in its ſtructure, and not leſs exceptionable in its doctrines, was the work which Mahomet delivered to his followers as the oracles of God.

The moſt prominent feature of the Koran, that point of excellence in which the partiality of its admirers has ever delighted to view it, is the ſublime notion it generally impreſſes of the nature and attributes of God. If its author had really derived theſe juſt conceptions from the inſpiration of that Being whom they attempt to deſcribe,

ſcribe, they would not have been ſurround-ed, as they now are on every ſide, with error and abſurdity. But it might eaſily be proved, that whatever it juſtly defines of the divine attributes, was borrowed from our holy ſcripture; which even from its firſt promulgation, but eſpecially from the completion of the New Teſtament, has extended the views, and enlightened the underſtandings of mankind; and thus furniſhed them with arms, which have too often been ineffectually turned againſt itſelf by its ungenerous enemies.

In this inſtance particularly, the copy is far below the great original, both in the propriety of its images, and the force of its deſcriptions. Our holy ſcriptures are the only compoſitions that can enable the dim ſight of mortality to penetrate into the inviſible world, and to behold a glimpſe of the divine perfections. Accordingly, when they would repreſent to us the happineſs of heaven, they deſcribe it, not by any thing minute and particular, but by

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ſomething general and great; ſomething, that without deſcending to any determinate object, may at once by its beauty and immenſity, excite our wiſhes and elevate our affections. Though in the prophetical and evangelical writings the joys that ſhall attend us in a future ſtate are often mentioned with ardent admiration, they are expreſſed rather by alluſion than ſimilitude, rather by indefinite and figurative terms, than by any thing fixed and determinate. [a] *Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* What a reverence and aſtoniſhment does this paſſage excite in every hearer of taſte and piety? What energy, and at the ſame time what ſimplicity in the expreſſion? How ſublime, and at the ſame time, how obſcure is the imagery?

Different was the conduct of Mahomet in his deſcriptions of heaven and of para-

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

diſe.

diſe. Unaſſiſted by the neceſſary influence of virtuous intentions and divine inſpiration, he was neither deſirous, nor indeed able to exalt the minds of men to ſublime conceptions, or to rational expectations. By attempting to explain what is inconceivable, to deſcribe what is ineffable, and to materialize what in itſelf is ſpiritual; he abſurdly and impiouſly aimed to ſenſualize the purity of the divine eſſence. Thus he fabricated a ſyſtem of incoherence, a religion of depravity, totally repugnant indeed to the nature of that Being, who, as he pretended, was its object; but therefore more likely to accord with the appetites and conceptions of a corrupt and ſenſual age.

That I may not appear to exalt our Scriptures thus far above the Koran by an unreaſonable preference, I ſhall produce a part of the ſecond chapter of the latter, which is deſervedly admired by the Mahometans, who wear it engraved on their ornaments, and recite it in their prayers.

" God

" [b] God! there is no God but he; the " living, the ſelf-ſubſiſting: neither ſlum- " ber nor ſleep ſeizeth him: to him be- " longeth whatſoever is in heaven, and " on earth. Who is he that can intercede " with him but through his good plea- " ſure? He knoweth that which is paſt, " and that which is to come. His throne " is extended over heaven and earth, and " the preſervation of both is to him no " burden. He is the high, the mighty."

To this deſcription who can refuſe the praiſe of magnificence? Part of that magnificence however is to be referred to that verſe of the Pſalmiſt, whence it was borrowed, "[c] *He that keepeth Iſrael, ſhall neither ſlumber, nor ſleep.*

But if we compare it with that other paſſage of the ſame inſpired Pſalmiſt, all its boaſted grandeur is at once obſcured, and loſt in the blaze of a greater light.

[b] Sale's Kor. ii. p. 30. 4to. edit. [c] Pſal. cxxi. 4.

[d] *O my God, take me not away in the midſt of my days; thy years are throughout all generations. Of old haſt thou laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They ſhall periſh, but thou ſhalt endure: yea all of them ſhall wax old, as doth a garment; as a veſture ſhalt thou change them, and they ſhall be changed; but thou art the ſame, and thy years ſhall not fail.*

The Koran, therefore, upon a retroſpective view of theſe ſeveral circumſtances, far from ſupporting its arrogant claim to a ſupernatural work, ſinks below the level of many compoſitions confeſſedly of human original; and ſtill lower does it fall in our eſtimation, when compared with that pure and perfect pattern which we juſtly admire in the ſcriptures of truth.

It being then abundantly apparent that no miracle either was externally performed for the ſupport, or is internally involved

[d] Pſal. cii. 24, 25, 26, 27.

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in the compoſition, of the Mahometan revelation, we proceed to enquire, whether it be better atteſted by prophecy, that other grand evidence of a miſſion from heaven.

The knowledge of futurity is one of the moſt unequivocal and incommunicable characters of the moſt High. By this he ſtamps a ſeal on the genuine illapſes of his ſpirit, and diſtinguiſhes them from the viſions of enthuſiaſm and the fables of impoſture. Of this Mahomet was conſcious, and endeavoured to avail himſelf. Senſible of the credibility that ariſes from the evidence of prophecy, he appealed to prophecy for the authenticity of his miſſion.

There were no popular prophetic traditions among the Arabians, that might be wreſted to favour his pretenſions. The Jewiſh and Chriſtian ſcriptures, therefore, which he acknowledged as divine, were the only ſources whence he could attempt to derive any predictions of his coming.

Though

Though the later advocates of the Mahometan cauſe have laboured to diſcover ſuch predictions in our Bible in its preſent form, we know that it contains nothing to countenance their attempt. So weak a claim the great pretender himſelf forebore to alledge; and more artfully reſted his pretenſions on a falſehood, which, though ſtill more abſurd and improbable, is, by its very abſurdity, more difficult to be diſproved. He frequently and boldly affirmed, that his miſſion had been foretold by the prophets in the Hebrew Teſtament, and more particularly by Chriſt in the Goſpel: and that both Jews and Chriſtians expecting his coming, and dreading his ſucceſs, had concurred in the atrocious crime of mutilating their ſcriptures; and, to deprive him of the teſtimony thoſe prophecies afforded, had expunged them from the ſacred pages.

But, the idea of this pretended corruption of the ſacred writings, draws after it a train of the moſt improbable concluſions.

ſions. That the moſt diſcordant ſects had united in deſtroying an article of their own faith, for the unaccountable purpoſe of diſcrediting a perſon to be born in a future age; and that their attempt ſucceeded in thus mutilating a book diſperſed through every country in every language, is among the conſequences of this extraordinary hypotheſis. But we have the ſtrongeſt reaſons to believe, that our holy ſcriptures, by the care of a good providence, have deſcended to us pure and perfect, from their original times.

There is indeed no evidence of the authenticity of any compoſitions, but what equally attends the books of the Old and New Teſtament. Nay, there are no ancient writings, which bear ſuch peculiar and diſcriminating characteriſtics of authenticity. Their importance made them ſubjects of deep attention and conſideration; and their authority occaſioned them to be appealed to by chriſtians of every perſuaſion. Different ſects watched over them

with a jealous eye, leſt they ſhould be corrupted; and as each made them a ſtandard, each contributed to preſerve their identity.

To confirm us ſtill further in this opinion, we have the concurring teſtimony of many ancient writers, of the primitive fathers of the church, and of heretics who maintained the moſt claſhing and oppoſite tenets; whoſe ſcriptural quotations, though made with different views from different copies, all uniformly refer to one and the ſame Bible. The very exceptions to this general poſition are few, and contribute additional proofs in favour of the ſacred text: for every mutilation, however inconſiderable, every depravation, however artful, to which the rage of controverſy had given birth, were inſtantly detected by the activity, and expoſed by the indignation of the oppoſite party.

There are extant at this day various manuſcripts of both Teſtaments, much older

older than the Hejra. Such are the Vatican and Alexandrian manuſcripts; the dates of which are generally aſcribed by the critics to the fourth, or fifth, century. In theſe we no where find any mention of Mahomet, or any other alluſion to his coming, than the general prediction *that falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets ſhould ariſe.*

But to enter at large into this ſubject is neither conſiſtent with my plan, nor indeed neceſſary to my argument; ſince a ſlight conſideration of theſe obvious proofs will afford the cleareſt conviction, that thoſe imaginary prophecies which Mahomet alledged, if they had ever exiſted in the ſacred volume, would have exiſted ſtill; and in truth, that no ſuch corruption as he pretended, has ever happened to our ſcriptures.

Thus was a man of no common talents, reduced by the very nature of his enterpriſe to bear record of himſelf, to ſupport his own cauſe by his own unſupported

teſtimony, and to maintain a weak and defenceleſs claim by a futile and abſurd appeal to prophecies which had no exiſtence.

It appears then, that the pretenſions of Mahomet are not accompanied by any of thoſe marks of external evidence, which may always be expected to confirm and to diſtinguiſh a divine revelation. The proofs which he adduced in ſupport of his claims are, in every point of view, weak and unſatisfactory. To miraculous power, that moſt infallible and deciſive teſt of divine interpoſition, he openly diſclaimed every pretence; and even boldly denied its neceſſity to confirm the miſſion of a prophet. He deemed it ſufficient to appeal to a ſecret and unatteſted intercourſe with an angel; and above all, to the inimitable excellence and ſublimity of the Koran. To the former of theſe pretences no ſerious attention is due; for inſtead of affording any evidence in ſupport of the claims of Mahomet, it notoriouſly wants proofs to eſtabliſh its own authenticity.

With regard to the boaſted excellence of the Koran, which, as the impoſtor alledged, bore ſtrong and viſible characters of an almighty hand, and was deſigned by God to compenſate the want of miraculous power, and to ſupply every defect of external evidence, we have already ſeen how ill-founded are its haughty and arrogant pretenſions to a divine original.

From a view of the real merits of that celebrated work, and from a conſideration of the peculiar circumſtances under which it was written and delivered to the world; from its want of invention, of order, of conſiſtency; from the real character and abilities of its author; and from the ſignal advantages which he enjoyed in a language copious and expreſſive, harmonious and refined; in the years which were ſpent in previous meditation, and the ſtill longer ſpace which was afterwards employed in its compoſition; and above all, in the opinions, the habits, and

the prejudices of his countrymen; I ſay, from a due conſideration of theſe important particulars, we are fully juſtified in reſolving all its merit and all its ſucceſs, into the agency of ordinary and human cauſes.

But the evidence which Mahomet alledged in ſupport of the character he had aſſumed, was not only in itſelf fallacious and equivocal; we may alſo trace plain marks of impoſture in the manner in which that evidence was propoſed and enforced. Senſible of the weakneſs of his credentials and of the ſuſpicion to which the proofs he had adduced were juſtly liable, he anxiouſly laboured to miſlead the unwary, and to confound the ignorant by the arrogance of his claims, and the confidence of his aſſertions.

Thus inſtead of delivering his pretended revelation to his followers, and leaving it to ſtand or fall by the determination of their own cool and diſpaſſionate judg-

judgment, he endeavoured to anticipate their opinions, employed every artifice to enhance its merit, and embraced every opportunity to exaggerate its excellence by the moſt pompous and elaborate encomiums on its perfection.

Hence aroſe his bold and haughty defiance of the united powers of every order of created beings to produce a work of equal beauty and ſublimity with the miraculous Koran; hence too proceeded his groundleſs, yet oſtentatious appeal to the teſtimony of the ancient prophets; from whoſe writings he was confeſſedly unable to produce a ſingle prediction, which could, with any probability of conſtruction, be wreſted to favour his pretenſions.

Compelled by the nature of his ſituation and deſign, to ſupport one impious falſehood by another ſtill more atrocious, the artifice and the audacity of the impoſtor carried him yet farther; and in order to afford ſome countenance to his extrava-

gant appeal to the evidence of prophecy, induced him to charge both Jews and Chriſtians with the odious, but impoſſible crime of corrupting their ſcriptures.

Such were the vain pretences, and ſuch the unſubſtantial proofs by which the prophet of Arabia laboured to confirm and to authenticate his miſſion. But far different was the conduct, and different the evidence, which was adduced, by Jeſus Chriſt, in ſupport of his claim to the character and office of the Meſſiah.

Into this contraſt, however, the time will not at preſent permit me to enter. The conſideration of that long and aſtoniſhing train of Miracles, and of that equally ſtupendous chain of Prophecies, on whoſe collective evidence, as on a firm and immoveable baſis, our holy religion ultimately reſts, would unavoidably lead me into too wide a field of inveſtigation.

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The infinite importance of the ſubjects naturally demands our moſt ſerious and earneſt attention, and is, I truſt, ſufficient fully to juſtify me in reſerving them as objects of future and more particular diſcuſſion.

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SERMON VII.

JOHN X. 25.

Jeſus anſwered—The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witneſs of me.

HAVING in my laſt diſcourſe endeavoured to expoſe that empty ſhew of external evidence, by which the Arabian impoſtor laboured to ſupport his impious pretenſions, I now proceed, in purſuance of my general plan, to examine and ſtate the proofs on which Jeſus Chriſt reſted his claim to the character of a divine teacher. In the words which I have now read to you, our Lord replies to the captious queſtions of the Jews concerning his dignity and office; and refers them to the Miracles which he

wrought

wrought as affording plain and undeniable evidence of his miſſion.

Every one knows, what is meant by a Miracle; though divines have differed about the preciſe terms of definition. Some have defined it in language too looſe and equivocal; and have thus confounded that which is unaccountable with that which is miraculous: others, to avoid this extreme, have ſo narrowed the definition as to make it inapplicable even to events which are truly entitled to that denomination. I will not attempt to give ſuch a definition as ſhall be exact without being defective; and comprehenſive without being redundant. It is ſufficient to ſay, that by a Miracle I mean "An "event out of the ordinary and ſettled "courſe of nature, and ſuch as could "not have been produced either by the "operation of its general laws, or the "combination of contingent circum-"ſtances:" Or— "An operation per-"formed by any particular agent, which "tranſcends his ſkill and power, and

"which

" which required the aſſiſtance of a ſu-
" pernatural being."

[a] A celebrated champion of infidelity, has inſidiouſly or erroneouſly maintained a Miracle to be contrary to experience; whereas it is in reality only different from it. Experience informs us, that *one* event has happened often—teſtimony informs us that *another* event has happened once, or more. That diſeaſes ſhould be *generally* cured by the application of external cauſes, and *ſometimes* at the mere word of a prophet, and without the viſible application of cauſes, are facts not inconſiſtent with each other in the nature of things themſelves, or irreconcileable according to our ideas. Each fact may ariſe from its own proper cauſe; each may exiſt independently of the other; and each is known by its own proper proof, be it of ſenſe or teſtimony. As ſecret cauſes often produce events contrary to thoſe we *do* expect from experi-

[a] Mr. Hume.

ence,

ence, it is equally conceivable that events ſhould ſometimes be produced which we do *not* expect.

To pronounce therefore a Miracle to be falſe, becauſe it is different from experience, is only to conclude againſt its general exiſtence from the very circumſtance which conſtitutes its particular nature: for if it were not different from experience, where would be its ſingularity? Or what particular proof could be drawn from it, if it happened according to the ordinary train of human events, or was included in the operation of the general laws of nature? We grant that it does differ from experience: but we do not preſume to make our experience the ſtandard of the divine conduct. He that acknowledges a God, muſt at leaſt admit the poſſibility of a Miracle. The Atheiſt that makes him inſeparable from what is called nature, and binds him to its laws by an inſurmountable neceſſity; that deprives him of will, and wiſdom, and

power, as a diſtinct and independent Being, may deny even the very poſſibility of a miraculous interpoſition, which can in any inſtance ſuſpend or counteract thoſe general laws by which the world is governed. But he who allows of a firſt cauſe in itſelf perfect and intelligent, abſtractedly from thoſe effects which his wiſdom and power have produced, muſt at the ſame time allow, that this cauſe can be under no ſuch reſtraints as to be debarred the liberty of controuling its laws as often as it ſees fit. Surely the Being that made the world, can govern it, or any part of it, in ſuch a manner as he pleaſes: and he that conſtituted the very laws by which it is in general conducted, may ſuſpend the operation of thoſe laws in any given inſtance; or impreſs new powers on matter, in order to produce new and extraordinary effects.

Here indeed it is proper for me to obſerve, that the force exerted in every Miracle is finite, and may, in many caſes, be

be in itſelf far leſs than what we ſee employed in the ordinary courſe of the world. The ſudden ſuſpenſion of the force, which preſerves any one planet in its orbit, is leſs than the conſtant exerciſe of that force, which preſerves all the planets in their reſpective orbits; and yet it may be properly miraculous. It is not therefore neceſſary to ſay, that Miracles cannot be performed by a power leſs than infinite. That no beings can change, or counteract, or ſuperſede the order of things, as eſtabliſhed by the Deity, without his appointment, is indeed the clear and neceſſary conſequence of his omnipotence; but that he may appoint them to change it, involves no contradiction: that purpoſes of the higheſt moment may be anſwered by ſuch appointment, implies no abſurdity; and, therefore, in the caſe of Miracles, whether the Deity performs them immediately by himſelf, or mediately by other agents, the great ends of religion are equally ſecured,

cined, and the proofs of his interpoſition may be equally luminous.

Miracles may be claſſed under two heads: thoſe which conſiſt in a *train* or *combination of events*, which could not have reſulted from the ordinary arrangements of Providence; and thoſe *particular operations* which are performed by inſtruments and agents incompetent to effect them without a preternatural power.

In the conduct of Providence reſpecting the Jewiſh people, from the earlieſt periods of their exiſtence, as a diſtinct claſs of ſociety, to the preſent time, we behold a ſingularity of circumſtance and procedure, which we cannot account for on common principles. Comparing their condition and ſituation with that of other nations, we can meet with nothing ſimilar to it in the hiſtory of mankind. So remarkable a difference, conſpicuous in every revolution of their hiſtory, could not have ſubſiſted through mere accident. There

muſt have been a cauſe adequate to ſo extraordinary an effect. Now, what ſhould this cauſe be, but an interpoſition of Providence in a manner different from the courſe of its general government?—for the phenomenon cannot be explained by an application of thoſe general cauſes and effects that operate in other caſes.

The original propagation of Chriſtianity was likewiſe an event, which clearly diſcovered a miraculous interpoſition. The circumſtances which attended it were ſuch, as cannot rationally be accounted for on any other poſtulatum. I have already conſidered this ſubject at large. I would now obſerve, that the inſtitutions of the Law and the Goſpel may not only appeal for their confirmation to a *train of events*, which, taken in a general and combined view, point out an extraordinary deſignation, and vindicate their claim to a divine authority; but alſo to a number of *particular operations*, which, conſidered diſtinctly, or in a ſeparate and detached

light, evidently diſplay a ſupernatural power, immediately exerted on the occaſion.

Since Chriſt himſelf conſtantly appealed to theſe works as the evidences of his divine miſſion and character, we will briefly examine, how far they juſtified and confirmed his pretenſions.

That our Lord laid the greateſt ſtreſs on the evidence they afforded; nay, that he conſidered that evidence as ſufficient to authenticate his claims to the office of the Meſſiah with all reaſonable and well diſpoſed enquirers, is manifeſt not only from the words of my text, but alſo from a great variety of other paſſages in the Evangeliſts.

Thus, when the diſciples of John were ſent to Chriſt, to receive from his own lips the moſt ſatisfactory proofs of his divine miſſion, he referred them to his Mi-

racles. [b] *Go*, ſaid he, *and ſhew to John again thoſe things which ye hear and ſee: the blind receive their ſight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raiſed up.* Again, [c] *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not: but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.*

This appeal to Miracles was founded on the following juſt and obvious grounds.

FIRST, that they are viſible proofs of divine approbation, as well as of divine power: for it would have been inconcluſive to have reſted an appeal on the teſtimony of the latter, if it had not at the ſame time included an evidence of the former: and it was indeed a natural inference, that working of Miracles in defence of a particular cauſe, was the ſeal of Heaven to the truth of that cauſe. To ſuppoſe the contrary, would be to ſup-

[b] Matt. xi. 4. [c] Joh. x. 25.

poſe,

poſe, that God not only permitted his creatures to be deceived; but that he deviated from the ordinary courſe of his providence, purpoſely with a view to deceive them. The concluſion which the man, whom our Saviour reſtored to ſight, drew from this Miracle, was exceedingly juſt, and founded on the common ſentiments, and impreſſions of the human heart. [d] *We know*, ſays he, *that God heareth not ſinners: but if any man be a worſhipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.* If the cauſe which our Lord was engaged in, had not been approved of by God, it would not have been honoured with the ſeal of Miracles: for the divine power can never be ſuppoſed to counteract the divine will. This would be to ſet his nature at variance with itſelf; and by deſtroying his

[d] Joh. ix. 31, 32.

ſimplicity, would deſtroy his happineſs and terminate in confuſion and miſery.

Hence we may juſtly reject as incredible thoſe Miracles, which have been aſcribed to the interpoſition of wicked ſpirits. The poſſibility of their interference is a mere hypotheſis, depending upon gratuitous aſſumption, and leading to very dangerous conſequences: and the particular inſtances in which credulous ſuperſtition, or preverted philoſophy, has ſuppoſed them to interfere, are, as Facts, deſtitute of any clear and ſolid evidence, or as Effects, often reſolvible into natural cauſes.

SECONDLY, when our Lord appealed to his Miracles as proofs of his divine miſſion, it preſuppoſed that thoſe Miracles were of ſuch a nature as would bear the ſtricteſt examination; that they had all thoſe criteria, which could poſſibly diſtinguiſh them from the deluſions of enthuſiaſm, and the artifices of impoſture; elſe

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the appeal would have been fallacious and equivocal.

He appealed to them with all the confidence of an upright mind, totally poſſeſſed with a conſciouſneſs of their truth and reality. This appeal was not drawn out into any laboured argument; nor adorned by any of the embelliſhments of language. It was ſhort, ſimple, and deciſive. He neither reaſoned, nor declaimed on their nature, or their deſign. He barely pointed to them as plain and indubitable facts, ſuch as ſpoke their own meaning, and carried with them their own authority.

The Miracles which our Lord performed, were too public to be ſuſpected of impoſture; and being objects of ſenſe, they were ſecured againſt the charge of enthuſiaſm. An impoſtor would not have acted ſo abſurdly, as to have riſqued his credit on the performance of what he muſt have known it was not in his power to effect.

And though an enthuſiaſt, from the warmth of imagination, might have flattered himſelf with a full perſuaſion of his being able to perform ſome miraculous work; yet when the trial was referred to an object of ſenſe, the event muſt ſoon have expoſed the deluſion. The impoſtor would not have dared to ſay to the blind, *Receive thy ſight*, to the deaf, *Hear*, to the dumb, *Speak*, to the dead, *Ariſe*, to the raging of the ſea, *Be ſtill*, leſt he ſhould injure the credit of his cauſe, by undertaking more than he could perform. And though the enthuſiaſt, under the deluſion of his paſſions might have confidently commanded diſeaſe to fly, and the powers of nature to be ſubject to his controul; yet their obedience would not have followed his command.

The Miracles of Chriſt then were ſuch as an impoſtor would not have attempted; and ſuch as an enthuſiaſt could not have effected. They had no diſguiſe; and were in a variety of inſtances of ſuch a nature,

as to preclude the very poſſibility of colluſion. They were performed in the midſt of his bittereſt enemies; and were ſo palpable and certain as to extort the following acknowledgement even from perſons who were moſt eager to oppoſe his doctrines, and to diſcredit his pretenſions: [c] *This man doeth many Miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.*

The Miracles Chriſt performed, were indeed ſufficient to alarm the fears of thoſe whoſe downfall was involved in his ſucceſs. And it was impoſſible for them to deny the facts, which ſo many thouſands were ready to atteſt on evidence too certain to admit even the poſſibility of miſtake, deluſion, or impoſture. But his enemies, who admitted their reality and yet reſiſted their deſign, by not acknowledging the perſon who wrought them to be the Meſſiah, had recourſe to the moſt impious and moſt abſurd ſuppoſitions, in

[c] John xi. 47, 48.

order

order to evade their evidence. The heathen imputed them to ſome occult power of magic; and thus applied what has no exiſtence in nature, in order to account for a phenomenon that exiſted out of its common courſe. The ſtories of the Jews, who confeſſed the Miracles, but denied what they were intended to eſtabliſh, are too ridiculous to be mentioned. I muſt not however omit to take notice of the wicked and blaſphemous cavil of the Phariſees, and the noble reply which our Lord made to it. They could not deny the fact, but they imputed it to the agency of an infernal ſpirit. [f] *This fellow, ſaid they, doth not caſt out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jeſus knew their thoughts and ſaid unto them, Every kingdom divided againſt itſelf is brought to deſolation; and every city or houſe divided againſt itſelf ſhall not ſtand: and if Satan caſt out Satan, he is divided againſt himſelf; how ſhall then his kingdom ſtand?*

The purity of the doctrine which was taught by our bleſſed Lord, was totally adverſe to the kingdom of darkneſs. It tended to overthrow it, by the introduction of principles far different from thoſe which Satan would inſpire; and by proſecuting objects totally oppoſite to thoſe which that wicked and malignant ſpirit would tempt us to purſue: ſo that in proportion to the prevalence of the kingdom of Chriſt, the kingdom of Satan would of courſe be diminiſhed. Now, ſuppoſing Miracles to be in the power of an infernal ſpirit, can it be imagined that he would communicate an ability of performing them to perſons, who were counteracting his deſigns? Would he by them give credit to a cauſe, that tended to bring his own into diſgrace?

Thus, as our Saviour appealed to Miracles as proofs of his power; ſo he appealed to the inherent worth and purity of the doctrines they were intended to bear witneſs to, as a proof that the power was of God. In this manner do

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the external and internal evidences give and receive mutual confirmation, and mu-

The truth of the Chriſtian religion does not, however, wholly depend on the Miracles wrought by its divine founder, though ſufficient in themſelves to eſtabliſh his claims: but in order to give the evidence of Miracles the ſtrongeſt force they could poſſibly acquire, that evidence was extended ſtill farther; and the ſame power that our Lord poſſeſſed, was communicated to his diſciples; and their more immediate ſucceſſors. Whilſt yet on earth, he imparted to them this extraordinary gift, as the ſeal of their commiſſion, when he ſent them to preach the goſpel: and after his glorious reſurrection and aſcenſion into heaven, they were endowed with powers yet more ſtupendous. Senſible of the validity of this kind of evidence, the apoſtles of our Lord, with the ſame artleſs ſimplicity, and the ſame boldneſs of conſcious integrity, which diſtinguiſhed their great maſter, conſtantly in-

ſiſted upon the Miracles they wrought, as ſtrong and undeniable proofs of the truth of their doctrines. Thus the Miracles of our bleſſed Lord may be juſtly conſidered as the evidence of his divine miſſion and character.

If we conſider their nature, their greatneſs, and their number; and if to this conſideration we add that which reſpects their end and deſign, we muſt acknowledge, that no one could have performed them, unleſs God was with him. They were too public to be the artifices of impoſture; too ſubſtantial and too numerous, to afford the ſlighteſt ſuſpicion of undeſigned and fortuitous coincidence. In a word, ſuppoſing that the divine Being ſhould in any inſtance ſo far counteract the common laws of nature, as to produce a Miracle; and ſhould deſign that Miracle as a monument to future times of the truth of any particular doctrine, we cannot conceive any mode of communicating it more effectual than that which

which he has choſen. Stronger proofs could not be afforded, conſiſtently with the deſign of the goſpel, which is not to overpower our underſtandings by an irreſiſtible and compulſory light, but to afford us ſuch rational evidence as is ſufficient to ſatisfy moral enquirers, who are endowed with faculties to perceive the truth; but at the ſame time who alſo have power totally to reſiſt it, and finally to forfeit all its bleſſings.

It would lead me too far to purſue the ſubject of Miracles in detail. What I have to urge, may be, however, comprized under the following heads.

Theſe Miracles were of a nature too palpable to be miſtaken. They were the objects of ſenſe; and not the precarious ſpeculations of reaſon concerning what God might do; or the chimerical ſuggeſtions of fancy concerning what he did. The facts were recorded by thoſe who muſt know whether they were true or falſe.

falſe. The perſons who recorded them, were under no poſſible temptations to deceive the world. We can only account for their conduct on the ſuppoſition of their moſt perfect conviction, and diſintereſted zeal. That they ſhould aſſert what they knew to be falſe; that they ſhould publiſh it with ſo much ardour; that they ſhould riſque every thing dear to humanity, in order to maintain it; and at laſt ſubmit to death, in order to atteſt their perſuaſion of its truth in thoſe moments when impoſture uſually drops its maſk, and enthuſiaſm loſes its confidence; that they ſhould act thus in oppoſition to every dictate of common ſenſe, and every principle of common honeſty, every reſtraint of ſhame, and every impulſe of ſelfiſhneſs; is a phenomenon not leſs irreconcileable to the moral ſtate of things than Miracles are to the natural conſtitution of the world. Falſehood naturally entangles men in contradiction, and confounds them with diſmay: but the love of truth invigorates the mind; the

conſciouſneſs

conſciouſneſs of integrity anticipates the approbation of God; and conſcience creates a fortitude, to which mere unſupported nature is often a ſtranger †.

The divine miſſion of our bleſſed Lord was not only ſupported by a variety of Miracles which carried with them every mark of a ſupernatural power, and were immediate and viſible evidences of the concurrence of the great ruler of nature in that cauſe which they were brought to defend; but it was illuſtrated and confirmed by a train of Prophecies, which beginning with the fall, opened with greater luſtre and with a wider proſpect, as the fulneſs of time drew near, in which they were to receive their accompliſhment.

To Prophecies then as well as Miracles, both Chriſt and his Apoſtles frequently appealed, as proofs of his miſ-

† For ſome further obſervations on Miracles, ſee the Notes.

ſion.

ſion. But he did not, like Mahomet, build his pretenſions on ſome predictions that had no exiſtence; or on others of which the conveyance was traditionary, and the meaning was equivocal. On the contrary he appealed to thoſe that were actually contained in public and ſolemn records, and which had been preſerved for ages, with the care and reverence which was due to their high authority and momentous import. Theſe records were preſerved in the hands of his enemies, who admitted their divinity, and were well informed of their contents, ſo that he could not be accuſed of ſupporting his claims by doubtful and diſgraceful evidence; by writings which long neglect had obſcured, or inſidious artifice had mutilated; by inferences from preceding records, which could not be contradicted, or by aſſumptions which lay out of the reach of ſerious and direct confutation. Nor leſs in nature and quality, than in origin and credit, were the Prophecies which our Lord appealed to, unlike

thoſe which Mahomet pretended to adduce in his favour; or thoſe which his infatuated followers in later ages affected to diſcover in the ſcriptures, and which they have wreſted with more abſurdity than plauſibility in ſupport of their prophet.

The Prophecies which reſpect the Meſſiah, are neither few in number, nor vague and equivocal in their reference; but numerous, pointed and particular. They bear on them thoſe diſcriminating marks by which divine inſpiration may be diſtinguiſhed from the conjectures of human ſagacity; and a neceſſary or probable event, from a caſual and uncertain contingency. They are ſuch as cannot be referred to the dictates of mere natural penetration, becauſe they are not confined to general occurrences; but point out with ſingular exactneſs a variety of minute circumſtances relating to times, places, and perſons, which were neither objects of fore-ſight nor conjecture, be-

cauſe

cauſe they were not neceſſarily connected with the principal event, or even probable either in themſelves or in their relation. They were ſuch as could only have occurred to a mind that was under the immediate influence of the divinity, by which diſtant periods were revealed and the ſecrets of unborn ages diſcloſed.

The ſcheme of Prophecy conſidered in its firſt opening, its gradual advance, and its final and full completion in the advent, the miniſtry, the death and reſurrection of the Meſſiah, and the extenſive progreſs of his goſpel among the Gentiles, together with its bleſſed influence on individuals, ſocieties, countries, and the whole race of mankind; is an object the greateſt and moſt ſublime that imagination can conceive; and the moſt pleaſing and important that the human mind can contemplate.

We behold the promiſe of a Redeemer given to our firſt parents immediately

after the fall, in obſcure and general terms. It foretold a victory that would be gained over the enemy that had deceived and conquered them; a victory the moſt illuſtrious in its effects and conſequences; and which ſhould amply revenge on the *ſerpent's head* the evils and miſeries which he had introduced into the world.

We behold the promiſe renewed in ſomewhat clearer language to the Patriarchs; particularly to Abraham, the great father of the faithful.

Here the great purpoſes of providence begin to diſcloſe themſelves with a fuller and brighter luſtre at every ſtep. With this venerable patriarch the Almighty condeſcended to enter into a peculiar covenant; and to excite his obedience, he promiſed to raiſe up from him a great nation; to take him and his family under his immediate patronage; and to make all the

the nations of the earth bleſſed through him [8].

The latter part of this promiſe is peculiarly memorable, as containing in it the proper end for which God had choſen and ſeparated him and his poſterity. It is very fitly made by the ſacred writers the foundation of God's diſpenſations to him; and may be regarded as a mark to direct the reader to the great object, to which they ultimately referred.

The ſcene opens with one man; and extends itſelf wider and wider, till we ſee the light of divine truth diffuſing its influence over the earth by Jeſus Chriſt, who according to the fleſh ſprang from his loins; and fulfilled the promiſe made unto the Father, that *in Iſaac ſhould his ſeed be called.*

We firſt ſee the promiſe of God to this ancient Patriarch fulfilled by giving him

[8] Gen. xxii. 17, 18. xxvi. 4.

a ſon, contrary to all human expectations. The next grand ſtep of its accompliſhment was in the twelve Patriarchs. We ſee them through the amazing, and to human view, incomprehenſible direction of divine Providence, ſettled in Egypt: and through the influence of Joſeph, who miraculouſly became a perſon of diſtinguiſhed credit, and conſequence in the court of Pharaoh, treated with peculiar reſpect; and indulged with allotments which made their ſituation not merely commodious, but even ſplendid.

At length the ſcene changes, but the great drama is ſtill carried on. Its intricacies are unravelling, and its deſign unfolds itſelf more and more. For what can baffle eternal wiſdom? Or what can counteract the might of omnipotence? The poſterity of Iſrael are ſubjected to the tyranny of a king, *that knew not Joſeph*. They are oppreſſed, and harraſſed, and reduced to the moſt abject ſtate of penury and ſervitude. Their cries,

cries, however, enter into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth; and a deliverer is ſent.

He firſt attempts to deliver them by the voluntary conſent of Pharaoh. He endeavours to convince their oppreſſor by the moſt awful and ſtupendous Miracles, that God was with his people of a truth; that he would avenge their wrongs; and that he who oppoſed them fought againſt heaven. But the haughty ſpirit of Pharaoh diſdained ſubmiſſion: though conſcience ſometimes was appalled, and made him anticipate what he had neither the courage to defy, nor the virtue to prevent. When arguments which he was unable to confute, aided by miracles he was unable to deny, could not ſhake him from his purpoſe; when every conceſſion was retracted, as ſoon has it was made; when ſtubbornneſs and irreſolution actuated him alternately, and craft was called in to the aid of violence; Moſes by the command of the Moſt High endea-

voured to reſcue this oppreſſed people by force.

In ſpite of oppoſition and contrary to all human proſpect of ſucceſs in the arduous and hazardous enterprize, he left Egypt; reſolved to reſiſt if purſued, and to die rather than return to the houſe of bondage. Under the greateſt diſadvantages, and amidſt appearances the moſt unpromiſing, this great man, ſupported by the arm of omnipotence, conducted his followers out of the land of Egypt: and that God might ſhew his power, and give them the moſt undeniable proof of his divine patronage, he led them deſignedly out of the direct and common path, and brought them to the Red Sea. There the Lord made bare his arm, opened a paſſage in the deep, and guided them through, as on dry land. Miracles were diſplayed to animate their hopes, as well as to diſpel their fears. Their eſcape had the air of a triumph: where they had paſſed through ſafely the Egyp-

tian hoſts were overwhelmed with deſtruction.

The difficulties which this people ſtruggled with in a barren and dangerous wilderneſs were peculiarly great: difficulties which were heightened ſtill by their own ingratitude, diſcontent, and unbelief. They laboured under all the calamities of peſtilence, of famine, and of war; they had all the rage of the elements, and all the deſolations of the earth to contend with. Yet ſtill amidſt theſe intricate and perilous paths, through which they were called to wander, the unerring purpoſe of God was neither fruſtrated, nor impeded. The plot, viewed only in broken and detached ſcenes, was embarraſſed and involved; but there was an Almighty preſider over every ſucceſſive event, who by a gradual evolution of his deſigns conferred order and conſiſtency on the whole.

When

When they were parched with thirſt, then did omnipotence cauſe even the flinty rock to flow for their refreſhment; when hungry and faint with the toils of the day, then did heaven ſupply them with its own manna, and ſent quails into their camp to ſatisfy their extreme neceſſities. By the ſame power the walls of a fortified city fell to the ground: [h] *and the ſun and moon ſtood ſtill in their habitation* at the voice of the leader of Iſrael.

Armies renowned for battle, and commanded by ſkilful and powerful leaders, *were driven aſunder* (to uſe the expreſſive language of ſcripture) *like the foam upon the waters, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn* [i]. Surely we may ſay, God was with this people. He led on their victorious bands; conducted them over Jordan, and at laſt ſettled them in the land promiſed to their forefathers. Here he eſtabliſhed his throne, and erected his

[h] Hab. iii. 11. [i] Hoſ. x. 7. Job xxiv. 24.

temple.

temple. Here he delivered the great ſtatutes of his kingdom, the laws of righteouſneſs, and the ordinances of diſtinction. Here too, by the mouth of all his holy prophets, he gradually diſcloſed the ſeveral particulars of the grand and myſterious ſcheme of man's redemption; and here he at length accompliſhed them in that great event, which included the reſult of all.

The important purpoſe for which the Jews *in general* had been thus miraculouſly ſeparated from the reſt of mankind, was evidently to prepare the way for the coming of the Meſſiah, by preſerving and tranſmitting the worſhip, the promiſes, and the predictions of the Almighty to future generations. The *particular* ſeparation of one tribe from the great body of the Jewiſh nation, was plainly an act of the ſame divine power, and became, in a manner equally ſtriking, ſubſervient to the accompliſhment of the ſame great deſign.

As

As he who was to bleſs all the families of the earth, was to ſpring from the ſeed of Abraham, ſo it was foretold that he ſhould ariſe out of the tribe of Judah, which was a particular branch of that general ſtock. For the ſake of preſerving a recorded lineage in uninterrupted ſucceſſion, this tribe was kept diſtinct amidſt every revolution of the Jewiſh nation: and amidſt the depreſſions and changes of its various ſtates, as it had been foretold by Jacob, Judah maintained within itſelf a peculiar prerogative and dignity, till the great end which was to be effected by its ſeparation from the other tribes of Iſrael, as well as from the world in general, was accompliſhed. The Prophecy limited the period when this end would be fully anſwered; even when Shiloh, or the Meſſiah, ſhould come: and then its authority ſhould ceaſe, and the very enſigns and badges of its former dignity and pre-eminence ſhould be no more: the ſceptre ſhould depart from Judah; and its law-giver ſhould loſe all authority

thority to enact laws, and all power to enforce them [k].

The ſcene of prophecy opened with a clearer and more majeſtic view to David and the Prophets. David foretold the change of the order of the prieſthood by the Meſſiah; the office he ſhould himſelf ſuſtain; the ſufferings he ſhould undergo; and the glorious triumphs he ſhould enjoy from his reſurrection, his aſcenſion, and the extenſive propagation of his goſpel [l].

In proceſs of time it diſcloſed ſecrets ſtill more inſcrutable to human penetration; and unfolded, to the aſtoniſhed eye, events and circumſtances that were beyond the power of imagination to conceive, or of expectation to anticipate: events of which preſent appearances gave no intimation; and circumſtances ſo totally independent of the general occurrences of the world, that ſuppoſing the

[k] Gen. xlix. 10. [l] Pſal. ii. 6, &c. cx. 1, &c.

latter

latter to have been foreſeen, yet the former would not have been conjectured.

The Prophets have not only foretold in general terms a great revolution that would take place in the world by the coming of the Meſſiah, but they have delineated ſome particular circumſtances attending it, which only the eye of omniſcience could have foreſeen. They have marked out the preciſe [m] time and [n] place of our Saviour's birth; they have deſcribed with wonderful exactneſs the diſtinguiſhing features of his office and character: they have diſplayed with equal beauty and truth the effects and conſequences of his advent: and through all their predictions ſomething pointing to the Meſſiah either by direct application, or by ſecondary and diſtant reference, is ſo interwoven with the general contexture, the univerſal ſcheme of Prophecy, that by keeping it in our eye, we ſhall be furniſhed with a clue to trace out their

[m] Dan. ix. 24, &c. [n] Mic. v. 2.

ultimate

ultimate deſign and contemplate their mutual connection with, and dependance on each other: *for the Teſtimony of Jeſus is the ſpirit of Prophecy.* This is its ruling and its vital principle. Diveſted of this, it loſes its ſpirit and its power. We behold no conſiſtency. The impreſſion of its dignity is weakened; its object is debaſed; its end is darkened. But viewed in this light, we behold in it a harmony which delights; a grandeur which aſtoniſhes: and from the reſult of the whole ariſes ſuch evidence as carries conviction to the underſtanding.

The prophet Iſaiah has particularly foretold, that the Meſſiah ſhould be born of [o] a virgin, and that he ſhould deſcend from the family of [p] David, which was a particular branch of the tribe of Judah. While he points out his miraculous birth, and deſcribes his deſcent, he portrays his character in colours ſo ſtriking and diſtinguiſhing, as to render its appropriation to

[o] Iſaiah vii. 14. [p] Ibid. ix. 6, 7. xi. 1, 2.

Chriſt,

Chriſt, obvious to every one who compares the picture with the original. It was this holy Prophet, that foretold, that the Meſſiah ſhould be [q] deſtitute of outward power or influence to attract the eſteem, and enſure the attachment of the world; that though in the eye of God he ſhould be [r] *the chief corner-ſtone*, elect, precious; yet that he ſhould be [s] *a ſtone of ſtumbling and a rock of offence* to men who were guided by the ſprings which in general actuate the human breaſt, ſuch as intereſt, ambition, and the love of ſenſual enjoyments: and particularly it was foretold, that the [t] Jews *ſhould fall on this rock*; ſhould refuſe to build on him as the only foundation of their hopes; but ſhould in their attempt to ſhake and overthrow it, be themſelves ſcattered and broken to pieces. The ſame Prophet declared, that he ſhould [u] veil the eyes of the wiſe and learned, and preach the goſpel to the poor and illiterate; that he ſhould [x] reſtore ſight

[q] Iſaiah liii. 1, 2, 3. [r] xxviii. 16. [s] viii. 14, 15.
[t] Ibid. [u] vi. 9, 10, 11. [x] xlii. 1, &c.

to

to the blind, health to the diſeaſed, and light to thoſe who had been oppreſſed with darkneſs; that he ſhould teach the true and perfect way, and ſhould be the great inſtructor of the Gentiles; that [y] kings ſhould fall down before him, and all nations pay him homage and obedience; that his reign ſhould be gentle and benevolent; and that the influence of his goſpel ſhould harmonize the jarring [z] paſſions of mankind, and [a] together with the knowledge and worſhip of the true God, eſtabliſh peace and purity on the earth.

In the fifty-third chapter, the Prophet gives a moſt ſtriking and affecting picture of the temper and behaviour of the Meſſiah amidſt the moſt diſtreſſing and humiliating ſcenes through which he paſſed. His death, conſidered as the great propitiation for the ſins of the whole world, was an object of ſuch vaſt importance, that it pleaſed the divine Being ſtrongly to mark the more diſtinguiſhing circum-

[y] Iſai. lx. 10. [z] lv. 13. [a] lvi. 6, 7, 8.

ſtances of it in prophetic language; to the end that our faith in him might have every evidence to confirm it that was neceſſary to give ſatisfaction to modeſt and impartial enquirers. The fact in every reſpect correſponded with the prediction; and ſo far was the prophet introduced into the ſecret counſels of the divine mind, that when he ſpoke of future events, he appears to be relating their paſt hiſtory: for to that omniſcient God, whoſe light directed the prophet's eye through the darkeſt receſſes of diſtant ages, preſcience and accompliſhment are the ſame; and the future and the paſt form but one object. Hence the moſt ſtriking ſcenes of our Lord's paſſion are delineated by the prophetic pencil with the ſame truth and exactneſs, as if they had been drawn on the ſpot when the ſecret volume of the divine decrees was unrolled, and when that which had been foreſeen in viſion was exhibited in reality [b].

[b] Compare Mark xv. 27, 28.

The

The ancient Prophecies concerning [c] the rude inſults and the ungracioues taunts of the people; their caſting of lots for his veſture, and parting his garments amongſt them; [d] the ſoldier's attack on his dead body; and his being lodged after death in [e] the ſepulchre of the rich; literally deſcribe thoſe circumſtances which did in fact attend the paſſion of our bleſſed Lord.

Prophecy became more clear and illuſtrious, as *the day-ſpring from on high* advanced. Its laſt period ſucceeded the return of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon: and the three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, gave a ſtriking account of the character and office of the Meſſiah; and of the glorious effects of his advent.

I have not time to enlarge on the particular nature and diſtinct objects of thoſe later Prophecies; nor to point out their

[c] Pſal. xxii. 7, 18. [d] Zech. xii. 10. [e] Iſai. liii. 9.

immediate correſpondence with the facts to which they related, and by which they were illuſtrated and fulfilled. It will be ſufficient to ſpeak of them with a general reference; and their application to our bleſſed Lord will be obvious to every one that has the ſlighteſt knowledge of the great end of his miſſion, and of the means which he made uſe of to accompliſh that end [f].

Thus the completion of diſtant and unconnected Prophecies in the life and character, the ſufferings and the triumphs of our bleſſed Saviour point him out as the *Meſſiah which was to come*; and in concurrence with the Miracles he wrought form a ſyſtem of external evidence, illuſtrious, harmonious, and convincing.

The time will not permit me to enlarge on the ſtriking Prophecies of our bleſſed Lord: but they were ſuch as gave

[f] See Hag. ii. 4, &c. Zech. vi. 11, &c. Mal. iii. 1, 2, 3. iv. 1, 2.

additional

additional evidence to his divine character, and clearly proved him to be filled with a ſpirit more than human. He uttered numerous Predictions of events altogether improbable on the ground of preſent appearances, and ſuch as the moſt penetrating mind could neither have foreſeen, nor conjectured; much leſs have deſcribed with all their peculiarities, and marked out the ſeveral incidents that attended them.

Our bleſſed Lord foretold his own death, with all its diſtinguiſhing circumſtances. He foretold the treachery of one diſciple, and the cowardice of another. He predicted the perſecutions to which his followers would be expoſed; the oppoſition which ſhould be made againſt the goſpel, and its extraordinary and glorious triumph over the power and policy of the world. He foretold the aſtoniſhing (and to all human views improbable) fate of the temple of Jeruſalem, and the ſignal deſtruction of the city. He even foretold

the period, when this awful event ſhould take place, and deſcribed the very enſigns of thoſe arms that were to effect the direful cataſtrophe. He foretold the various calamities that ſhould befall the Jewiſh nation, and the total ruin in which their church and ſtate ſhould be involved. All that was predicted was fully, clearly, and literally accompliſhed. The temple was levelled to the ground; nor could imperial munificence, when exerciſed with a malignant view to confront the Prophecy of our Lord, renew the ſtructure, or even remove the ruins of it, for the erection of another edifice. The Jews were overtaken by the ſevereſt inflictions of heaven, and the blood of him whom they had crucified, was revenged on their children, and their country; while to this day they remain the ſignal monuments of the truth of Prophecy; and having totally loſt the *ſceptre*, and having no *lawgiver* independently of a foreign tribunal, they afford a viſible and ſtanding proof,

proof, that *the Shiloh is come, to whom the gathering of the people ſhould be.*

From a revelation thus authenticated by a long and ſtupendous train of Miracles which bear the very ſtamp and ſeal of omnipotence; and by a ſtriking and connected ſeries of Prophecies, literally and exactly accompliſhed in the perſon of its author; Prophecies of events, which the eternal wiſdom could alone have foreſeen, and the eternal power alone have brought to paſs; from a revelation, I ſay, authenticated by ſuch overpowering evidence, what rational enquirer can withhold his aſſent? Or where, we may boldly aſk, amidſt the numerous varieties of religious opinion, which in all ages of the world have influenced the belief and directed the practice of mankind, where ſhall we find a ſyſtem that can boaſt of atteſtations in any degree equal, or ſimilar to thoſe of the goſpel? Let the adverſaries of our holy faith point out a religion that bears ſuch viſible impreſ-

ſions of an Almighty hand; let them do this, and we are content to renounce our cauſe, to forego for ever, what we now cannot but aſſert, the excluſive title of Chriſtianity to the venerable character of truth.

Surely in vain will they ſeek for ſuch a parallel in all the fictions of Mahometaniſm.

We have already examined the lofty pretenſions of the prophet of Arabia: but inſtead of evidence we have found extravagant and confident aſſertions; inſtead of argument we have heard bold and confuſed declamation. When called upon by his unbelieving countrymen to produce proofs of his miſſion, and to work ſome Miracle in atteſtation of his title to the Prophetic office, in the evaſive language of impoſture he ſhrunk from the juſt and pertinent requiſition; and with a tone of affected dignity, referred them to

the ſupernatural elegance and ſublimity of the Koran.

The Redeemer of mankind, in anſwer to the pious ſcruples of his friends, or the captious queſtions of his enemies, with the ſame majeſtic ſimplicity of an upright and elevated mind, appealed to *the Works which he wrought in his Father's name*; to the ſick whom he had healed, the blind who had received their ſight, the lepers whom he had cleanſed, and the dead whom he had raiſed to life.

If for a moment we admit, even in its utmoſt extent, that wildeſt claim of the impoſtor to the boaſted miracle of the Koran; yet weak and equivocal is the evidence it affords, when compared with thoſe mighty works which dignify and confirm the miniſtry of Jeſus Chriſt. The reality of this pretended Miracle, and the proof which ariſes from it, can only be determined at the fallible tribunal of taſte and criticiſm; but the works of Jeſus, inſtead

inſtead of reſting on the precarious ground of imagination, derive their credit from the teſtimony of the ſenſes, of all depoſitions the moſt faithful and unqueſtionable.

Nor is the inferiority of the religion of Mahomet to that of Chriſt leſs ſtriking and obvious with reſpect to the atteſtation of Prophecy, than it is with regard to Miracles. But to enter into a regular and formal contraſt of the two religions, would in either caſe be unneceſſary, and even impoſſible. For amidſt all the unſubſtantial viſions of Mahometaniſm, amidſt all the arrogant pretences of its founder, we are unable to diſcover any proofs which can with the leaſt ſhadow of reaſon, be oppoſed to the ſolid and convincing evidence of the goſpel.

Allowing, however, ex hypotheſi (what never can be granted in reality), the juſtice of that extravagant claim of the audacious impoſtor to certain predictions

which

which once exiſted in our ſcriptures; admitting yet further, the propriety of the interpretation by which his infatuated followers ſtill labour to wreſt a variety of paſſages, in ſupport of his pretenſions; yet even on theſe ſuppoſitions, who can without preſumption compare theſe vague and equivocal teſtimonies to the pointed and deciſive evidence which ariſes from the vaſt, the ſplendid ſcheme of Chriſtian Prophecy? A ſcheme, which by its magnificence overpowers the imagination, and of whoſe grandeur the moſt exalted deſcription can convey but faint and inadequate ideas.

We behold, with aſtoniſhment, a ſpirit of Prophecy pervading all time; commencing ſo early as the fall of man, and extending to the final conſummation of all things: we ſee it uniformly characteriſing one perſon; firſt by dark and obſcure intimations, then gradually unfolding itſelf with brighter and brighter luſtre at every ſtep, till the appearance of HIM

who

who was its ultimate end and object. In Him and his Apoſtles, but particularly in his beloved Diſciple, we behold it once more renewed, and predicting with peculiar exactneſs every important event which ſhould befall his church, even from its earlieſt eſtabliſhment down to that period of awful expectation, when the great plan of divine grace ſhall be brought to a glorious and conſiſtent concluſion, and the myſterious counſels of the Almighty, reſpecting the Chriſtian diſpenſation, ſhall be for ever cloſed in judgment.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

LUKE XIX. 22.

Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.

WHEN the Koran, by the revelation of its ſeveral chapters during the long period of more than twenty years, was at laſt completed, the Arabian prophet may be conceived ſtanding forth to public view, and ſummoning the contemporary world and all poſterity, to hear his unvarying teſtimony to its certainty and truth. With his volume in his hand he comes forward, and in ſuch terms as theſe he calls on the living and the unborn to be his judges. "This

"is

" is the Book of God: it contains his " laſt and moſt inviolable commands; it " proceeded immediately from heaven; " and was delivered by the mouth of an " angel: bleſſed are the faithful that " ſhall receive its doctrines, and curſed are " thoſe that oppoſe its authority."

But before we yield up our aſſent to theſe unqualified and peremptory demands, we are naturally led to enquire upon what reaſons they are founded. The feeble attempt that was made to ſupport them by an empty ſhew of external evidence, has already been ſufficiently expoſed. We will now proceed to examine, whether this pretended revelation be with greater ſucceſs atteſted internally, by the ſanctions of natural religion, and the eſtabliſhed opinions of mankind.

That we may advance by infallible deductions to the concluſion we ſhall form concerning the credibility of the Koran, let us take care to build nothing on the

periſhable ground of preſent prejudices; nothing on the queſtionable authority of any prevailing ſyſtem; nothing on any local and temporary maxims, that may be peculiar to age or country. Let us even exceed the meaſure of common juſtice and common candour; and try the Koran by a teſt contrived by one of its moſt zealous and ſucceſsful champions in that age when it was publiſhed, and among the people to whom it was firſt propoſed.

When the Caliph Omar, the contemporary and companion of Mahomet, was ſolicited to ſpare the celebrated Library of Alexandria, he replied to this effect: "Either the contents of thoſe books "agree with what is written in the holy "Koran, or do not agree. If they do "agree, then the Koran is ſufficient, and "thoſe books are uſeleſs: if they do not "agree, they are pernicious, and muſt "be deſtroyed."

Now,

Now, ſince the religion of Mahomet conſtantly admits the authority, and appeals to the teſtimony of former revelations, the Law and the Goſpel; we may, with ſome limitation, juſtly avail ourſelves of theſe principles in our enquiry into its truth.

FIRST, if the Koran agrees in hiſtorical information and doctrines with prior revelations, without any addition or improvement, it is evidently unneceſſary; and, therefore, it ſeems highly improbable that it ſhould have been revealed.

SECONDLY, if the Koran contains facts or doctrines contrary to thoſe which have been already revealed, it ſtands ſelf-condemned as an impoſture.

If in examining the Koran by the firſt of thoſe principles which I have aſſumed, we exclude ſo much of it as its author appears to have borrowed from the Jewiſh and Chriſtian ſcriptures, it can never

be

be allowed that the little which remains after this deduction, is of ſufficient conſequence or neceſſity to juſtify the ſuppoſition of an immediate interference of the Deity, by a new and ſolemn revelation. For when the Almighty governor of the univerſe, whoſe diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic it is to do nothing in vain, deviates from the ordinary courſe of his providence, and in compaſſion to the weakneſs and the ignorance of his creatures, graciouſly condeſcends to inſtruct them by a particular revelation of his will; it is natural to expect that the information contained in ſuch revelation, ſhould be, like the manner in which it is conveyed, intereſting and extraordinary. To ſuppoſe, therefore, that God has thus revealed to mankind what is in itſelf trifling and unimportant; or what was before equally known to them either by former manifeſtations of himſelf, or by the uſe of their own faculties, is to aſcribe to him a conduct in every reſpect unworthy his wiſdom; to ſuppoſe him to do what is

evidently unneceſſary to be done; and thus to act in direct contradiction to every idea which reaſon and experience teach us to form of his moral government.

Amidſt the numerous merits, whether fancied or real, which the enthuſiaſm of its advocates has aſcribed to the Koran, to that of Novelty it has, perhaps, of all others, the leaſt claim. Were it conſiſtent with the decorum of his time and place to enter into ſo minute a ſpecies of inveſtigation, it would be no difficult taſk to point out the ſeveral ſources from whence the impoſtor derived almoſt every doctrine, precept, and ceremony, which it preſcribes. But on the preſent occaſion, it will be ſufficient to our purpoſe, to inſtance in ſome few of the moſt important and intereſting particulars.

Of the various and incongruous materials which compoſe the miſ-ſhapen ſtructure of Mahometan ſuperſtition, the far greater and more valuable part may be

traced immediately, or ultimately, to the ſcriptures of truth. To them in particular muſt we have recourſe for the origin of whatever we diſcover of ſu[illegible]ty in the deſcriptions, of purity in the doctrines, or of ſound morality in the precepts of the Koran.

If it ſometimes ſurpriſes us with unuſual grandeur, and quitting the ordinary ſtyle, magnificently paints the Almighty ſitting on the eternal throne, encompaſſed with clouds and darkneſs, and giving laws to the univerſe; we inſtantly recognize the hallowed manner, the ideas, and even the language of the Hebrew prophets. When it deſcribes the various attributes of the Deity, whether phyſical or moral; when it repreſents him as omnipreſent, omniſcient, omnipotent; as true, and merciful, and juſt; it conveys no new, no clearer notions of his incomprehenſible eſſence than we before poſſeſſed: it only re-echoes the doctrines,

and feebly imitates the expreſſions of the inſpired penmen of the Old and New Teſtament. Even that grand and fundamental doctrine of the Unity of the Supreme Being, the eſtabliſhment of which was conſtantly alledged by the impoſtor as the primary cauſe of his pretended miſſion, contains no novel or unknown truth. It is the leading principle of the religion of nature; and it conſtituted one of the moſt important and diſtinguiſhing objects of a former revelation. The manifeſtation and preſervation of this momentous truth was one great end, to which the Moſaic inſtitution was ordained to be ſubſervient: and even the Goſpel, though it unfolds new ſcenes to our aſtoniſhed view, and preſents us with a clearer and fuller diſcovery of the divine nature, by revealing to us the myſterious doctrine of the exiſtence of three diſtinct Perſons in the Godhead; yet it ſtill maintains, and preſerves inviolate the Unity of the Supreme Being.

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But poſſeſſed only of a rude and imperfect knowledge of the doctrines of the Goſpel, and probably deriving that knowledge from its moſt corrupt and heretical followers, Mahomet ſeems to have entertained very groſs and miſtaken ideas of the Chriſtian Trinity, and to have been totally ignorant of the perfect conſiſtence of that opinion with the Unity of the Deity.

Hence we hear him continually reaſoning after this manner — "[a] Verily Chriſt "Jeſus the ſon of Mary is the apoſtle of "God, and his word, and a ſpirit pro-"ceeding from him. Believe therefore "in God, and his apoſtles, and ſay not, "there are three Gods. Forbear this; "it will be better for you: God is but "one God. Far be it from him that "he ſhould have a ſon! Unto him be-"longeth whatſoever is in heaven and on "earth: and God is a ſufficient pro-"tector. Chriſt doth not proudly diſ-

[a] Sale's Koran, edit. 4°. p. 80.

" dain to be the ſervant of God, neither " the Angels who approach near to his " preſence: and whoſo diſdaineth his " ſervice, and is puffed up with pride, " God will gather them all to himſelf at " the laſt day."

Hence too we behold almoſt every page of his pretended revelation marked with the fierceſt invectives, and denouncing the ſevereſt woes on all who impiouſly preſume to rob the Almighty of the honour due unto his name, by aſſociating other beings with him as his equals, and partakers of his majeſty and glory.

Thus the Koran, inſtead of contributing any thing to the removal of that veil of darkneſs which conceals the ineffable perfections of the Almighty from the view of ſhort-ſighted man; inſtead of enlarging our ideas, and extending our knowledge of the divine nature and attributes, tends to obſcure and weaken our perceptions of them, and to make void

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that revelation of himſelf which God had before vouchſafed to the world.

But if it be thus exceptionable as containing no improvement of former revelations, by conveying clearer or more diſtinct notions of the Deity; it is alſo equally liable to objections with reſpect to the worſhip which it preſcribes.

It was frequently the triumphant boaſt of the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles, that the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt had for ever freed mankind from the intolerable burden of ceremonial obſervances. But the religion of Mahomet renews and perpetuates the ſlavery, by preſcribing to its votaries a ritual ſtill more oppreſſive, and entangling them again in a yoke of bondage yet more ſevere than that of the Law. The Moſaic ceremonies, indeed (however deſtitute of merit in themſelves) were yet, when conſidered with a reference to the events with which

they were connected, ſtrikingly uſeful and ſignificant.

But arbitrary and unmeaning are the inſtitutions of the prophet of Arabia; inſtitutions, whoſe higheſt, and indeed only uſe, even in the eſtimation of their moſt zealous advocates, is that of proving the piety, and exerciſing the obedience of the faithful. And even thoſe ceremonies which he evidently borrowed from the Jewiſh Legiſlator, no longer poſſeſſing any relative merit, and being no longer commemorative of paſt, or typical of future events, ceaſe to be rational and expreſſive acts of devotion.

But whatever may be the propriety, and whatever the utility of thoſe numerous and irkſome obſervances with which the Mahometan ritual is burthened, ſcarcely one can be pointed out which is either new, or peculiar to that inſtitution. Beſides thoſe which its author preſcribed

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in imitation of the law of Moſes, there are others, which he derived from leſs pure and venerable ſources; from the ſenſeleſs and unauthorized traditions of the Rabbins, and from the ſuperſtitious cuſtoms of the barbarous and pagan Arabs.

Of thoſe carnal ordinances, ablutions, and proſtrations, with which the follower of Mahomet is commanded to approach the great Father of ſpirits; and of the rigorous faſts, by which he is directed to mortify his corrupt affections; the far greater part had been before introduced amongſt the eſſentials of religion, and obſerved with a ſcrupulous exactneſs by the later Jews: and many of them are ſaid to have prevailed even amongſt the idolaters of Arabia.

It was a command repeatedly and forcibly impreſſed on the Iſraelites by God himſelf, that they ſhould not, on pain of the moſt exemplary vengeance, preſume

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to transfer the impious ceremonies of idol-worſhip into the ſervice of the living God; or approach the altar of Jehovah with the ſame ſacrifices and rites, wherewith the nations around them ſerved their Gods. But the daring policy of Mahomet adopted, without heſitation, the fanciful and ſuperſtitious ceremonies with which his countrymen adored their imaginary deities; and ſcrupled not to ſanctify them with the authority, and engraft them on the worſhip of the one true, eternal, and ſelf-ſubſiſting God. Of this kind, amidſt a variety of inſtances too numerous to be recounted in this place, is that great and meritorious act of Mahometan devotion, the pilgrimage to the holy city; an act which the prophet has enjoined, and the pious Muſſulman implicitly performs, as neceſſary to the obtaining pardon of his ſins, and qualifying him to be partaker of the alluring pleaſures and exquiſite enjoyments of paradiſe.

Even

Even thoſe parts of the Koran, which are at firſt view moſt captivating by the appearance of Novelty, and in which its author ſeems to have given the reins to a luxuriant imagination, and to have expatiated at large in the boundleſs regions of fancy, will, upon a cloſer examination, be found to contain as little of novel, as they do of important information. With reſpect to the great and momentous doctrine of a future ſtate, and the condition of the ſoul after its departure from the body, it muſt indeed be acknowledged, that the prophet of Arabia has preſented us with a nearer proſpect of the inviſible world, and diſcloſed to us a thouſand particulars concerning it, which the holy ſcriptures had wrapped in the moſt profound and myſterious ſilence. But in his various repreſentations of another life, he generally deſcends to an unneceſſary minuteneſs and particularity, which excites diſguſt and ridicule, inſtead of reverence: and even his moſt animated deſcriptions of the joys of paradiſe, or the torments

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of hell, however ſtrong and glowing the colours in which they are painted, are yet far inferior in point of true ſublimity, and far leſs calculated to promote the intereſts of piety, by raiſing the hopes and alarming the fears of rational beings, than that degree of obſcurity in which the future life of the goſpel is ſtill involved, and thoſe more general terms in which its promiſes and threatnings are propoſed to mankind. Our holy religion, by the reſurrection of its great author, affords an evidence of another life peculiar to itſelf; an evidence far more concluſive and ſatisfactory than any which the Koran with all its arrogance can furniſh, in ſupport of this intereſting and awful truth. It alſo at the ſame time reveals to us every thing concerning the mode of our exiſtence in that life, which appears to be in any degree conducive to our comfort and happineſs in the preſent. Admitting, however, that a more particular and circumſtantial knowledge of a future ſtate than the Goſpel contains was neceſſary

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to the well-being of mankind; admitting alſo, that the Koran has ſupplied this defect, and communicated this valuable information to the world, yet ſtill we may with propriety deny the neceſſity of the Mahometan revelation. We know that the impoſtor conſtantly pretended to have received theſe ſtupendous ſecrets, by the miniſtry of an angel, from that eternal book in which the divine decrees have been written by the finger of the Almighty from the foundation of the world: but the learned enquirer will diſcover a more acceſſible, and a far more probable ſource from whence they might be derived, partly in the wild and fanciful opinions of the ancient Arabs, and chiefly in thoſe exhauſtleſs ſtores of marvellous and improbable fiction, the works of the Rabbins. Hence that romantic fable of the Angel of Death, whoſe peculiar office it is at the deſtined hour to diſſolve the union betwixt ſoul and body, and to free the departing ſpirit from its priſon of fleſh. Hence that imaginary,

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yet dreaded Tribunal, before which, when his body is depoſited in the grave, the trembling Muſſulman, on the authority of his prophet, believes he muſt appear, to render an exact account of his faith and actions. Hence too the various deſcriptions of the general Reſurrection and final Judgement, with which the Koran every where abounds; and hence the vaſt, but ideal Balance, in which the actions of all mankind ſhall then be impartially weighed, and their eternal doom be aſſigned them either in the regions of bliſs or miſery, according as their good or evil deeds ſhall be found to preponderate. Here too may be traced the grand and original outlines of that ſenſual Paradiſe, and thoſe luxurious enjoyments which were ſo ſucceſsfully employed in the Koran to gratify the ardent genius of the Arabs, and allure them to the ſtandard of the prophet. By proceeding in this manner, it might eaſily be ſhewn how little there is of novelty or originality in the pretended revelation of Mahomet; but I forbear to treſpaſs on

your

your patience by multiplying unneceſſary examples? It is ſufficient to repeat what I have before obſerved, that the Koran does not contain one ſingle doctrine which may not fairly be derived either from the Jewiſh and Chriſtian ſcriptures, from the ſpurious and Apocryphal goſpel current in the Eaſt, from Talmudical legends, or from the traditions, cuſtoms, and opinions of the Arabians. The ſame obſervation, which I have applied to the doctrines, may with ſome few limitations, be likewiſe extended to the precepts which the Arabian legiſlator has enjoined. That the Koran, amidſt a various and confuſed heap of ridiculous, and even immoral precepts, contains many intereſting and inſtructive leſſons of morality, cannot with truth be denied. Of theſe, however the merit is to be aſcribed, not to the feeble imitation, but to the great and perfect original from which they were mainfeſtly drawn. Inſtead of improving on the Chriſtian precepts by a ſuperior degree of refinement; inſtead of exhibiting a purer and more

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perfect ſyſtem of morals than that of the goſpel, the prophet of Arabia has miſerably debaſed and weakened even what he has borrowed from that ſyſtem. Every duty which he enjoins, every precept which he enforces, in imitation of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, though it may ſtill command ſome regard, has yet loſt much of its native beauty and majeſty, and bears ſtrong and evident marks of the impure and corrupt channel through which it has paſſed. Thus, if he ſometimes, in a tone of authority, ſummons his followers to the practice of the various duties of charity; if he commands them to give alms, to relieve the diſtreſſed, to forgive injuries; yet baſe and narrow is the principle on which he enforces theſe amiable virtues, when compared with the more liberal and beneficent ſpirit of the goſpel of Jeſus. Inſtead of exerciſing a vague and univerſal charity the diſciple of Mahomet is expreſſly taught to confine his benevolence to the followers of the prophet; inſtead of conferring his good offices on thoſe

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whoſe faith ſhall happen to differ from his own, he is warned againſt indulging the tender weakneſs of humanity, he is commanded to wage perpetual war with the guilty race, and to deem it a meritorious act to exirpate theſe enemies of his God from off the face of the earth.

But if ſuch be the inferiority of the Koran to preceding revelations, (for the ſame inferiority is obſervable in every other duty which it enjoins) it alſo labours under a diſadvantage equally ſtriking with reſpect to the motives by which thoſe duties are enforced.

Though different be the repreſentation of the joys and miſeries of another life, which the Goſpel and the Koran propoſe to their reſpective followers, yet the commands of both reſt ultimately on the ſame general ſanction of future rewards and puniſhments. But the religion of Chriſt juſtly aſſerts its ſuperiority over every other ſyſtem, whether true or falſe, by the peculiar

culiar and animating encouragements to obedience which it offers; encouragements alike unknown to the diſpenſation of Moſes, and to the pretended revelation of Mahomet.

Under all the diſtreſſes of life, and amidſt all the difficulties of his Chriſtian warfare, the faithful diſciple of Chriſt poſſeſſes a reſource, of which the Mahometan can form no conception, in the comfortable promiſe of divine grace to correct his errors, aſſiſt his frailties, and invigorate his reſolutions.

The pious Muſſulman is induced to comply with the various ordinances of his religion, from a reſpect to the authority, the promiſes, and the threatenings of his prophet: but though poſſeſſed alſo of the ſame incitements even in a much higher degree, the obedience of the Chriſtian is ſtill further ſecured by thoſe more engaging and endearing motives of love and gratitude to a Redeemer, who died to reſcue a guilty

a guilty world from the double ſlavery of ſin and death.

On the whole, then, the Koran, inſtead of ſupporting its arrogant pretence of being the grand cloſe and conſummation of the divine revelations; inſtead of preſenting us with any improvement of the Law and the Goſpel, appears in fact to be the groſſeſt corruption and perverſion of both.

Under theſe circumſtances, to ſuppoſe that it proceeded from the wiſe and benevolent God, would be to ſuppoſe a manifeſt abſurdity; to invert the known order and conduct of his providence; and to make the fuller, and more clear, and perfect of the divine diſpenſations prior to, and preparatory of the partial, and obſcure, and imperfect.

But in our application of the SECOND Principle, which I have aſſumed, to the Koran, we ſhall find charges of a more direct and poſitive nature to object againſt

it; we ſhall here remark the plaineſt, and the boldeſt contradictions to that law and that goſpel, which at the ſame time it every where proclaims to be divine; and on whoſe authority it vainly attempts to found its own claim to divinity. With reſpect to doctrines, various and irreconcileable are the differences which might be pointed out; yet on theſe, though ſufficient at once to confute the pretenſions of Mahomet, I at preſent forbear to inſiſt. They were perhaps intentional, and adopted in order to promote more effectually the plans of intereſt and ambition which he had concerted.

But the Koran not only ſpeaks a language contrary to the ſcriptures in the ſpeculative truths and doctrines which it profeſſes to reveal, it alſo differs materially with regard to facts. A ſtronger, or more prominent example of what I now aſſert, cannot be ſubmitted to your conſideration than its audacious denial of that plaineſt and moſt important event in all

the hiſtory of the goſpel, the death of Jeſus Chriſt on the croſs. Hear the words of the great impoſtor himſelf on this ſubject, where ſpeaking of the Jews he ſays, "They have ſpoken againſt Mary "a grievous calumny; and have ſaid, "Verily we have ſlain Chriſt Jeſus the "ſon of Mary, the Apoſtle of God; "yet they ſlew him not, neither cruci-"fied him, but he was repreſented by "one in his likeneſs: and verily they "who diſagreed concerning him, were "in a doubt as to this matter, and had "no ſure knowledge thereof, but fol-"lowed only an uncertain opinion. They "did not really kill him; but God took "him up unto himſelf: and God is "mighty and wiſe [b]."

Mahomet indeed was not the firſt to propagate this bold and extravagant falſehood. Even in the earlieſt age of the church, whilſt the blood of Chriſt had been yet recently ſhed at Jeruſalem, there

[b] Koran, p. 79.

aroſe a ſect who with ſingular effrontery maintained, that he had ſuffered in appearance only, and not in reality; and that the Jews and officers of Pilate had waſted their ineffectual rage on an airy phantom, who ſeemed to endure the tortures which they inflicted, and at laſt to expire on the croſs. But the apocryphal goſpel of Barnabas, a work which ſeems to have been originally forged by heretical Chriſtians, and ſince interpolated to favour the views of Mahomet and his followers, correſponds more exactly with the repreſentation of the Koran. We are there told, that in the night in which Jeſus was betrayed, at the inſtant when the Jews were about to apprehend him in the garden, he was miraculouſly carried up into heaven by the miniſtry of Angels, whilſt the traitor Judas, taken ſuddenly in the ſnare which himſelf had laid, was crucified in his likeneſs and his ſtead.

But whatever may be the corrupt ſource from whence the impoſtor derived ſo palpable

pable and notorious a falſehood; whatever be the cauſe which procured its admittance, whether ignorance or deſign, the argument is ſtill equally concluſive againſt the veracity of the Koran.

If additional proofs were neceſſary to refute the impious claim of the Mahometan impoſture to a divine original, I might ſtill further obſerve, that it is not only inconſiſtent with preceding revelations, but alſo with itſelf.

The advocates for the Mahometan cauſe labour indeed to obviate any objection which may be drawn from theſe glaring contradictions by the doctrine of abrogation. God, ſay they, in purſuance of the great plan of his providence was pleaſed to command many things in the holy Koran, which for wiſe and good reaſons he afterwards revoked. But not to mention the doubts and uncertainty, which muſt thus have been unavoidably introduced into a revelation, which ought to

be perfectly clear and explicit in all that it commands; it is evident, that ſuch a conduct, though well accommodated to the ſhifting policy of a capricious mortal, is totally incompatible with the eternal wiſdom of the immutable God.

Every revelation which profeſſes to come from God, ſhould doubtleſs be ſuited to our apprehenſions of his perfections; but numberleſs are the inſtances in which the Koran either commands or permits what is plainly contradictory both to the nature of the Deity, and to that original law of right and wrong which he has univerſally impreſſed on mankind. Indeed the general character of its precepts is too ſtrongly marked, for the moſt inattentive obſerver to doubt of the origin from whence they flowed. The impure deſign which gave birth to the whole ſyſtem, may be traced in almoſt every ſubordinate part; even its ſublimeſt deſcriptions of the Deity, even its moſt exalted moral precepts, not infrequently either

either terminate in, or are interwoven with ſome proviſion to gratify the inordinate cravings of ambition, or ſome licence for the indulgence of the corrupteſt paſſions of the human heart. It has given a ſanction to fornication, and if any weight be due to the example of its author, it has juſtified adultery. It has made war and rapine and bloodſhed, provided they be exerciſed againſt unbelievers, not only meritorious acts, but even eſſential duties to the good Muſſulman; duties, by the performance of which, he may ſecure the conſtant favour and protection of God and his prophet in this life, and in the next, entitle himſelf to the boundleſs joys of paradiſe.

Thus has the pretended revelation of Mahomet accompliſhed the great end for which it was deſigned, by reforming the corruptions which time and the preverſeneſs of human nature had unhappily conſpired to introduce into preceding revelations! And thus ſignally has it improved

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on the pure and ſpiritual morality of the goſpel!

From the whole then of what has been ſaid, we are juſtified in concluding, that the Koran, when conſidered by itſelf, independently of other revelations, is in every reſpect unworthy the God of purity: and that when taken on its own principle, as grounded on the law and the goſpel, it is notoriouſly and indiſputably falſe.

If now we apply the ſame reaſoning to Chriſtianity, as ſubſequent to the law of Moſes, which we have already applied to the Koran, the contraſt will be found highly favourably to our religion.

From a view of the nature and qualities of the Moſaic law, we ſhall be convinced that it was both partial and temporary. The Jews were a diſtinct claſs of people, ſeparated from all nations of the world, and preſerved from mixing with

with them by means of certain rites and ceremonies, which were evidently deſigned to keep this diſtinction ſacred and inviolable.

They ſtood ſingle amongſt mankind, and bore on them the viſible marks of a divine and appropriate deſignation. The general government of Providence was (if I may ſo expreſs myſelf) epitomized in the particular ſuperintendence of the Deity over this diſtinguiſhed people: it was reduced to a ſcale more contracted indeed, but more ſtriking. The Jews ſtood forward to the world as a proof that there is a God that judges the earth; and that he, whoſe name alone is Jehovah, is the moſt high over all. They were ſelected to be the depoſitaries of thoſe holy records in which the truths of God are revealed and his precepts are enforced: and they were ordained to be the means of tranſmitting his name, his worſhip, his promiſes, and his predictions to future generations.

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But as the Moſaic inſtitution was of a partial nature, ſo was it of a limited duration. When its deſign was accompliſhed, it was of courſe to ceaſe. It was admirably adapted to anſwer the ends for which it was appointed: to impreſs the mind with a ſtrong ſenſe of the divine unity and government; to preſerve ſome of thoſe fundamental truths of natural religion, which were either wholly denied, or groſſly corrupted by other nations; to unfold the great deſigns of providence and grace; and thus gradually to prepare the way for the coming of the Meſſiah, and to diſpoſe the human mind for the reception of thoſe doctrines, which it was his peculiar office to reveal to the world.

The great and characteriſtical difference between the law of Moſes and that of Chriſt, ſeems to be this. The former chiefly reſpected the proſperity and intereſts of the preſent life, and the good order of a particular community, governed by

by laws peculiar to itſelf. The latter principally has in view our ſpiritual welfare, and the intereſt of a future and eternal ſtate; founded on the relation in which we all ſtand to God as his creatures, and governed by precepts and motives ſuited to our condition as guilty and imperfect, but as rational and accountable beings. The one was narrow and confined in its view; the other large and extenſive as the human race: and as the former was inſtituted for one particular people, ſo was it limited to a certain duration: but the latter, as it reſpects all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues; ſo does it reſpect all time. It received its origin in ſome degree from the fall; and it will endure to the final reſtitution of all things. The law of Moſes was compoſed of ordinances that only ſuited one purpoſe: and when that purpoſe was anſwered, its obligation was at an end. But the law of Chriſt comprehends principles which ſuit every purpoſe

poſe of every rational creature upon earth; and being adapted to the general intereſts of mankind, will continue to be obligatory upon thoſe to whom it is revealed, as long as the world endures.

The law of Moſes, abſtracted from the reference which it bore to a fuller and more ſpiritual diſpenſation, was imperfect and defective. Its inſtitutions were ſuperfluous and trifling. Some of them tended rather to ſhackle and debaſe, than to exalt the mind; and to make religion the burthen of neceſſity, rather than the tribute of the will. Perſons of groſs and low ideas, who were unwilling or unable to look beyond the letter of the law, contented themſelves with an outward performance of outward ceremonies; having waſhed their bodies, they thought themſelves pure from their ſins; and having preſented their offerings to the prieſt, flattered themſelves with the preſumption of having diſcharged their duty towards

towards God. But though the law was imperfect, when conſidered by itſelf; yet if we view it in the connection in which it ſtands with a fuller and more liberal diſpenſation, we ſhall ſee its relative importance; and ſhall adore that wiſdom, which has ſo diſpoſed the various parts of the one great plan of providence and grace, as to make them illuſtrative of the truth, and ſubſervient to the uſes of each other.

It is evident that the law of Moſes in its various inſtitutions had a reference to ſome future diſpenſation; and that from the object to which they pointed, they derived all their conſequence and utility. Ablutions of the body were a ſignificant and religious exerciſe, when they were performed with an eye to the ſanctification of the heart, and the purifying the affections from natural or acquired pollutions. Sacrifices and offerings were uſeful and inſtructive rites, when conſidered as evidences of the divine diſpleaſure againſt

ſin; and as bearing a reference to the ſacrifice of the Meſſiah, *who*, as the prophet Iſaiah declares, *was to be cut off, but not for himſelf.* In him, and the great Atonement made by the offering up of his own body on the croſs, all the ſacrifices of the law received their completion. It was his death that moſt clearly illuſtrated their deſign; and as it explained their nature, it at the ſame time aboliſhed their uſe.

The repetition of ſacrifices was a ſtong and deciſive proof of their imperfection. The apoſtle reaſons on this ſubject with great force and accuracy in the tenth chapter of the epiſtle to the Hebrews. The law, he obſerves, being only typical of a future diſpenſation, could have no efficacy by itſelf. It had no abſolute virtue; no independent merit. *It could never with thoſe ſacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect.*

But

But the comparative imperfection of the law of Moſes will appear more fully from the weakneſs of its motives, when oppoſed to thoſe of the goſpel. The promiſe of mercy to pardon, and grace to aſſiſt, was not ſo full and explicit, as it was under the more benign diſpenſation of the Lord Jeſus: *for the law came by Moſes, but grace and truth by Jeſus Chriſt.* Religion is generally characterized in the Old Teſtament under the denomination of the fear of God; and I apprehend the reaſon to be this: The Jews were accuſtomed to very awful repreſentations of the Deity; and living under the diſcipline of a *ſchool-maſter* (as the apoſtle calls the law) fear prevailed beyond every other principle in their religious ſervices. Objects were darkened in coming to them through the veil of types and figures, the meaning of which was but very gradually diſcloſed even to the prophets themſelves: and that too, only in proportion to their nearer approach to the fullneſs of time, when their ultimate purpoſe was to be

more illuſtriouſly diſplayed in their fulfilment by Chriſt. Obſcurity always creates dread: and when the divine Being was ſeen only through the terrible majeſty of the law, his attributes rather excited awful veneration than filial confidence. But when God was manifeſted in the fleſh, we beheld the glory of his perſon in the face of his only begotten Son; and we beheld it full of grace and truth.

The motives which enforced obedience on the Jews, were always adapted to their knowledge. As the diſcoveries of truth opened on their minds, ſo were the privileges which were connected with them proportionally unfolded. Nevertheleſs, in the moſt enlightened periods of the Jewiſh church, we find but very few and very feeble traces of thoſe ſublime and endearing motives, by which Chriſtianity is adorned and recommended.

The law of Moſes was wholly enforced by temporal ſanctions; not that a

future ſtate was unknown to the Jews; they had ſome faint idea, ſome obſcure conceptions of it: but Moſes depending on a particular providence to accompliſh either what he had promiſed, or what he had threatened, omitted to place the doctrine of a future ſtate among the direct and poſitive ſanctions of his law. The *goſpel*, on the contrary, *has brought life and immortality to light*. It has diſperſed all thoſe ſhades, which ſo hung over it as to render it to the eye of unaſſiſted reaſon, a ſubject of doubtful ſpeculation, rather than of chearful hope: and has placed it in a point of view, unknown even to the favoured people of God under the law. It has reduced to a certainty what nature, at the fartheſt ſtretch of its powers, could barely regard as a conjecture; and demonſtrated as a fact, what the Jews were only permitted to behold through the obſcure medium of types and figures, as a diſtant probability. The clear diſcovery of a future ſtate, and the application of it as one of the great ſanctions of reli-

gion, were reſerved for the goſpel. Hence we are taught to regard man in a higher and nobler light, than nature with all her boaſted attributes and moſt ſplendid accompliſhments, can repreſent him. We are taught to conſider him as the heir of immortality; as made for two worlds; and as qualified to act in both, with increaſing capacities both of moral improvement, and of phyſical happineſs.

From theſe particulars it ſeems clearly to follow, that the goſpel ſo far from being ſuperfluous, was in every view highly expedient. The world ſtood in need of it, as a ſyſtem calculated to give general information, and diffuſe general happineſs: and to the Jews in particular it was neceſſary, as the conſummation of their law in all the great purpoſes of its inſtitution; and as ſupplying its defects by the doctrines it revealed, by the aſſurances it afforded of preſent grace, and by the encouragements it held forth

to

to the attainment of future and eternal glory

If we apply the SECOND Rule, we ſhall eaſily perceive, that the goſpel is in no reſpect contrary to the law; but that the New Teſtament is truly, what it profeſſes to be, the end and accompliſhment of the Old.

The word law, is in the holy ſcriptures, uſed in a variety of ſenſes. In the Old Teſtament, and alſo in the writings of St. Paul, it frequently denotes the ceremonies of the law of Moſes which diſtinguiſhed the Jewiſh religion, and the Jewiſh people from all others. Sometimes it means the moral law; and expreſſes particularly that ſyſtem of precepts relating to our religious and moral conduct, which mark the bounds of our duty to God and man.

The former was aboliſhed, when Jeſus

came to unite both Jew and Gentile under one comprehenſive and gracious diſpenſation; the latter ſtill continues in its original force; for it had not its foundation in any partial or occaſional reaſons, which only apply to a particular community, and are only ordained to anſwer a particular and temporary deſign: on the contrary, it is cloſely connected with the primitive laws of nature, and the unalterable conſtitution of things: it has its foundation in cauſes which can never ceaſe to operate on rational beings, and which are univerſal and perpetual. Be it, however, obſerved, that *Chriſt came not to deſtroy the law, but to fulfil it.* He did not deſtroy even the ceremonial law, till he had ſo fulfilled the deſign of its inſtitution, as to render it totally unneceſſary. When its end was anſwered, it of courſe vaniſhed away. The ſubſtance being come, the ſhadow was uſeleſs. But the abrogation of the ceremonial law did not imply any contradiction to its deſign, nor did it throw the ſlighteſt reflection on the

wiſdom

wiſdom of that God who inſtituted it. It was only a declaration that the law had anſwered every purpoſe, for which it was appointed; and that its obligation ceaſed, when the reaſon of its eſtabliſhment was at an end. Our bleſſed Lord moſt ſtrictly conformed to it, in order to ſhew his perfect approbation of it. In him it was complete; and with him it ceaſed for ever.

But with reſpect to the moral law, it was the great buſineſs of our Saviour's miniſtry to illuſtrate and confirm it. He added no precept that oppoſed it. He only cleared it from falſe gloſſes, and enforced it by ſtronger motives. Hence the apoſtle argues, *Do we make void the law by faith? God forbid—Yea, we eſtabliſh the law.* Every moral precept, is as obligatory now as it ever was: and Chriſtians have in this reſpect the ſame rule to walk by as the Jews had. Thus *the law of the Lord is perfect, and his commandments endure throughout all gene-*

rations. It is the original law written on the heart. It was rendered explicit by the law of the decalogue: and the law of the goſpel brings it forward with additional evidence and force. The grand truths of the goſpel were revealed, though obſcurely, in the earlieſt periods of the world: for the ſame God was the author of every diſpenſation of true religion; and he made the one ſo preparatory to the other, that the whole might be one uniform and conſiſtent plan, worthy of his unerring wiſdom, and entitled at once to our grateful acceptance and rational approbation.

God promiſed our firſt parents, that *the ſeed of the woman ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head.* He promiſed the patriarch Abraham, that *in his ſeed all the families of the earth ſhould be bleſſed.* The manner of this divine diſpenſation has been different in different periods: but the ſame ſpirit breathes in all; and in all the ſame object is purſued, recovery from the guilt

guilt and misery of sin, through the mercy of God displayed in a Mediator.

This is the basis of the evangelical covenant: and this glorious doctrine is coæval with revelation. Before the publication of the law, the knowledge of this doctrine was, indeed, very confined and obscure; but still there are traces of it in the earliest revelations: and the patriarchs had undoubtedly such impressions of it on their minds, as laid a foundation for that faith, in consequence of which their names are recorded with such honour in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. Under the law the great truths of the gospel, which were amply to be revealed in future times, were shadowed forth in sacrific rites, and other expressive ceremonies, well adapted to answer the purposes of a preparatory institution.

Yet the law of Moses, considered in a separate view, made no provision for the future

future pardon of moral guilt; and afforded no promiſe or hope of future happineſs. But though the covenant made with Moſes for one particular people, and for a determined period of time, contained no gracious promiſes of forgiveneſs in another life, yet the patriarchs and holy men of old were not deſtitute of ſuch hopes. From whence could thoſe hopes ariſe? from whence, but from that more general covenant of grace, publiſhed to Adam immediately after his fall, renewed with Noah, with Abraham, with David: the covenant which from them was delivered down to future generations by uninterrupted tradition; atteſted by the concurrent evidence of the prophets; typified by all the ſacrifices throughout the world; and particularly amongſt the Jews: and in the fulneſs of time, completely and finally eſtabliſhed by the coming of Jeſus Chriſt, who is the great Mediator of this covenant; who fulfilled on our account all its conditions; died to ſeal its promiſes with his blood;

blood; roſe again to demonſtrate the efficacy of his ſacrifice; and ever liveth to make interceſſion for us?

If I were to purſue this ſubject farther, I might ſhew you the perfect coincidence of the Old Teſtament with the New: but I have no time for a diſcuſſion ſo comprehenſive. It is ſufficient to obſerve, that the goſpel does not run counter to the law, ſo far as to render the one inconſiſtent with the other. Each was brought forward in its natural order, and each is linked with the other in the moſt perfect agreement. The ceremonial law, though vacated by the goſpel, yet was not aboliſhed till its own purpoſes were fully anſwered. The moral duties of the law are enforced with additional ſanctions, and illuſtrated with additional evidence. Its doctrines are confirmed and explained in their full latitude: what was obſcure, is made clear; and what was fore-told, has been accompliſhed. For the whole then we infer, that there is no inconſiſtency between

between the two diſpenſations. They coaleſce with each other, as parts of the ſame ſyſtem; and, with an exact conformity to all the deſigns of providence in the natural and the moral world, the more obſcure and partial are preparatory to the more perfect and illuſtrious.

If we contemplate the goſpel by itſelf, and view it in its own light, we ſhall have abundant reaſon to admire it, both for the purity of its nature, and the tendency which it has to promote the intereſts and happineſs of mankind. It bears on it the ſtamp of a divine original; and there is a ſpirit which animates and beautifies it, that muſt ſtrongly prepoſſeſs the pious mind in its favour.

The purity of the goſpel is indeed a deciſive evidence of the origin whence it proceeded: it is an evidence ever preſent; ever legible; and which no diſtance, whether of time or place, can efface. That purity is ſuch, as we ſhould naturally expect

pect from the ſentiments which uncorrupted nature leads us to form of the divine Being. If he had not already vouchſafed to grant us a revelation of his will, with reſpect to our duty both to him and to one another; yet, if we had reaſon to expect that he would grant it, the cleareſt dictates of our judgment, and the nobleſt ſentiments of our heart, would lead us to anticipate the ſame diſplay of benevolence on the part of God, and the ſame encouragements to virtue among men, which we now find in the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt.

As it is pure, ſo it is perfect. Whatever is neceſſary for us to know, is diſcovered by it: and diſcovered too in ſuch a manner, as to anſwer all the purpoſes of a revelation deſigned for general information. Speculations to exerciſe the ingenuity and wit of men are by no means eſſentially connected with the great buſineſs of immortality. A man may be acquainted with them, and not be the bet-

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ter; or ignorant of them, and not be the worſe. But in the goſpel we have nothing ſuperfluous, and nothing perplexing. Every declaration of ſin and duty; every promiſe to engage us to purſue the one, and every threatning to deter us from the other, are brought forward with a preciſion and ſimplicity, which leave no room either for the perverſe to cavil, or the impartial to miſtake. There is no vice, which it does not detect, even within the darkeſt retreats of the mind. There is no duty, connected with the glory of God, the welfare of our neighbour, or the true happineſs of ourſelves, but what it unfolds, and illuſtrates.

Its precepts are not only clear in their mode of delivery, and beneficial in their tendency; but they are enforced by every motive that is calculated to affect the heart, and to exalt and purify its affections. The promiſe of divine forgiveneſs and compaſſion through Jeſus, and of help and ſuccour through the divine ſpirit, are of the

the moſt ſoothing and engaging nature to beings encompaſſed with difficulties of various kinds; and expoſed to moral weakneſſes and tranſgreſſions, which are degrading to our nature, and deſtructive of our happineſs. But to inſpire us with the full ſoul of virtue and religion, it carries our aſpiring minds beyond the contracted views of this mortal ſcene, to that exalted world of ſpirits, where we ſhall be for ever advancing in knowledge and perfection, where every offence ſincerely repented of ſhall be pardoned, and every virtuous endeavour accepted and rewarded, by him who is our moſt compaſſionate father, as well as our moſt righteous judge.

SER-

SERMON IX.

PART I.

MATT. VII. 16.

Ye ſhall know them by their fruits.

THE characters of the religions which Chriſt and Mahomet have reſpectively founded, are not more different than thoſe of the nations which have embraced them. From the period of their primary eſtabliſhment to the preſent hour, a different aſpect ſeems to have belonged to them. Wherever they have ſpread themſelves, they have communicated their diſtinguiſhing properties to the underſtandings and affections of the people whom they have converted; and

in oppoſition to former experience, the influences of climate, of government, and of manners, have yielded to the effects of religious perſuaſion. The appearances they now give to thoſe great diviſions of mankind among which they are planted, form a moſt ſtriking part of the modern hiſtory of the world: and the inveſtigation of the cauſes which produce thoſe appearances, would conſtitute one of the moſt ſplendid ſubjects of political ſpeculation, even though it were not at the ſame time one of the moſt important to the intereſts of Chriſtianity.

The view of mankind, as arranged under this diſtinction of religious opinion, preſent to us very ſingular and permanent oppoſitions of national character.

The faith of Mahomet, wherever it is eſtabliſhed, is united with deſpotic power. On the banks of the Ganges, and on the ſhores of the Caſpian, under the influence of climates the moſt unlike, and manners the moſt oppoſite, it is ſtill found accompanied

panied with ſervitude and ſubjection: every free, and every gallant people whom it has involved in the progreſs of its power, have abandoned their rights when they inliſted themſelves under the banner of the prophet, and have forgotten in the title of the faithful, the pride of independence and the ſecurity of freedom.

The religion of Chriſt, on the contrary, is found to exiſt and to flouriſh under every variety of political power. In the different periods of its hiſtory it has been united with every form of government: and of the nations among whom it is now profeſſed, the moſt general, and perhaps the moſt diſcriminating feature is that equal and courteous ſyſtem of manners, which has operated in ſo a ſtriking a manner to limit the progreſs of tyranny; and which, even in the few countries where deſpotiſm is eſtabliſhed, has ſerved to ſoften the auſterity of its adminiſtration.

The nations who have embraced Mahometaniſm, are diſtinguiſhed by a ſpirit of hoſtility and hatred to the reſt of mankind. Wherever it has eſtabliſhed itſelf, the relations of ſituation, of language, and of national policy, have been controuled by the influence of religious enmity. The regulations which it preſcribes for the conduct of private life, have a tendency to ſeparate the Muſſulman from all communion with other men, and all participation of the offices of humanity: and in every period of its hiſtory, the pride, or the jealouſy, which it has inſpired, ſeems to have repreſented the reſt of mankind as enemies with whom, while they oppoſed the prophet's power, it were impious to converſe, and whom it was even meritorious to deſtroy.

The character of Chriſtian nations is, on the contrary, marked by a ſpirit of benevolence and humanity, as new in the hiſtory of mankind, as it is conducive to their welfare. The violence of national animo-

animoſity, once ſo fruitful a ſource of diſſenſion, has given way in a great meaſure to the dictates of more enlarged humanity. Where the religion of Chriſt has not always directed the conduct of men, it has at leaſt ſecretly influenced their opinions; and the union of European nations in the faith of the Goſpel has produced a general diſpoſition to courteſy and humanity, which in oppoſition to every diſtinction of language, of manners, and of national intereſts, has united the various people of whom it is compoſed, in one firm and ſacred bond of brotherhood and affection.

Of the nations who have embraced Mahometaniſm another feature equally conſpicuous, is a degree of ignorance ſtrangely inconſiſtent with that inſtinctive emulation, which the improvement of neighbouring ſtates uſually excites in the vanity of individuals or the policy of governors. Their progreſs in ſcience, their capacity to invent, and even their

willingneſs to adopt any uſeful or elegant arts, bear no proportion to their zeal and activity in the ſupport of their religious tenets. Through every country where Mahometaniſm is profeſſed, the ſame deep pauſe is made in philoſophy: and the ſame wide chaſm is to be ſeen between the opportunities of men to improve, and their actual improvement.

Every hearer whoſe mind has ever glowed with the love of learning, or melted with the feelings of humanity, muſt recoil with horror from the ſavage and brutal barbarity of thoſe Caliphs, who, not content with diſcouraging a ſpirit of enquiry among their ſubjects, effaced every veſtige of the knowledge attained by former ages, and waged unnatural war againſt the mind, as well as the arms of their ſpecies. The ſucceſs of their efforts is as much to be deplored, as the motives of them are to be deteſted. For, as prejudice took deep root, and ignorance had ſpread through a wider extent, we have

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ſeen thoſe maladies verified in Mahometan countries, which Tacitus ſo forcibly deſcribes, while impending over his own. "—[a] Ut corpora lente augeſcunt, cito "extinguuntur; ſic ingenia ſtudiaque "oppreſſeris facilius quam revocaveris. "Subit quippe etiam ipſius inertiæ dul-"cedo: et inviſa primo deſidia, poſtremo "amatur."

Such is preciſely the ſtate of the intellectual world among the followers of Mahomet: knowledge is not only neglected, but deſpiſed; not only the materials of it are baniſhed, but the very deſire of recovering and applying them is totally extinguiſhed. Hence the bold ſallies of invention are checked, the patient efforts of induſtry are unknown, and they who contribute not by their own diſcoveries to the common ſtock, are at the ſame time too perverſe to adopt, and too proud to revere what has been diſcovered by other men. The evil is, indeed, hopeleſs, when the

[a] Præfat. in Vit. Agric.

remedy itſelf is rejected with loathing and contempt: for how can the Mahometans emerge from that ignorance, which they are accuſtomed to conſider as meretorious? What power of reaſon will be ſufficient to break the magic ſpell, which now holds them in bondage to the tyranny of the deſpot, the policy of the prieſt, and the bigotry of the vulgar?

If the character of Chriſtian nations on the contrary were to be portrayed, the feature perhaps the moſt diſtinguiſhing in it, would be that intelligence which ſeems in general to pervade them. The ſpirit of ſcience, indeed, appears to reſt ſolely with them. Though buried for a time in the ignorance with which Europe was overſpread by the irruptions of the barbarous nations; though long oppreſſed by the violence of eccleſiaſtical power, and the groſſneſs of early ſuperſtition, its flame was not altogether deſtroyed. It burnt in ſecret at leaſt, even in the receſſes of monaſtic retirement; and though too feeble

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of itſelf to diſpel the gloom that ſurrounded it, yet was it preſerved from total extinction, amidſt the chimerical conceits of the fanatic, and the frivolous contentions of the recluſe. Rekindling at laſt in an age, in which the human mind ſeemed to emerge from the darkneſs in which it was involved, in which the ſpirit of liberty gave dignity and vigour to its exertions, and which the bounty of providence diſtinguiſhed by diſcoveries the moſt ſalutary to the human race, it ſoon attained its former luſtre: and no longer confined, as in earlier ages, to the opulent or the powerful, it now began to ſpread its equal light over the maſs of human kind, and to illuminate thoſe venerable forms of truth, of religion, and of freedom, which before were hidden from every vulgar eye.

Of the Reformation, indeed, it may be ſaid without the extravagance of partiality, or the declamation of panegyric, that no event, which either hiſtory has recorded

recorded, or philoſophy inveſtigated, has been attended with ſo extenſive and auſpicious a change in private and public life, in the government of nations, and in the manners of individuals, in the ſentiments of the higher ranks and the habits of the lower, in the cultivation of every polite attainment which adorns the mind, and the yet greater improvement of every profound ſcience which invigorates and enlarges it. The progreſſion of knowledge has been conſtant in every country where it began; the ſpirit of enquiry has, in every age, communicated itſelf to ſurrounding nations; and while our proficiency is ſuch as to juſtify us in boaſting of diſcoveries, to ſome of which former generations never reached, and to others to which they never aſpired, we have the conſolation to reflect, that a wide and unexplored field ſtill lies open for the moſt unwearied endeavours and the brighteſt talents: that our own ſucceſs has indeed been ſo rapid as to animate their emulation, and yet that our progreſs

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is hitherto ſo imperfect, as to facilitate, not to preclude their moſt vigorous exertions. In a word, from this eventful period the ſpirit of ſcience has been haſtening towards perfection. In every country diſtinguiſhed by the Chriſtian name, its influence has been felt, and its emulation has been known. And when we review mankind as inhabitants of the ſame globe; and mark the revolutions by which as men, or as nations, they are diſtinguiſhed, the character of Chriſtian may be determined by the ſuperior degree of intelligence which accompanies and adorns it.

Such is the extreme diverſity of character to be found among the nations who have embraced Mahometaniſm and Chriſtianity; and ſuch the appearance which theſe great diviſions of mankind aſſume under this diſtinction of religious opinions. In the Eaſt, under the influence of Mahometan belief, the human mind appears to have loſt ſomewhat of its

capacity

capacity and power; the natural progreſs of mankind, whether in government, in manners, or in ſcience, has been retarded by ſome ſecret principle of private indolence or external controul; and over the various nations who have either aſſented to the faith, or ſubmitted to the arms of the impoſtor, ſome univerſal, but baleful influence ſeems to have operated, ſo as to counteract every diverſity of national character, and reſtrain every principle of national exertion. In the Weſt, under the happy auſpices of Chriſtianity, men appear to have attained a vigour in their intellectual exertions, and extent in their intellectual purſuits, and a ſucceſs in their intellectual cultivation, utterly unknown in any former period of their hiſtory. Their purſuits, whether in ſcience, or in art, have been guided by a bolder ſpirit, and rewarded with more illuſtrious ſucceſs than in any former age of ſpeculation. The boundaries which before ſeem to have been impoſed to the exertions of the human mind, and to have limited not only

only the progreſs of genius, but even the proſpects of literary ambition, have been extended or removed.

The regular motions and comparative magnitudes of the celeſtial bodies, the ſimple but wonderful laws by which the material world is regulated; the inconſiderable proportion which the earthly and ſolar ſyſtems bear to the vaſt and glorious works of omnipotence, hold a diſtinguiſhed rank in the ſuperiority of modern over ancient philoſophy. The origin and combination of our ideas, the diſtinct offices and mutal connections of our mental faculties, the primary and unalterable foundations of morality, and the dependence of its various modes on collateral and adventitious circumſtances, have been inveſtigated with unwearied diligence, and explained with the niceſt preciſion. To theſe abſtruſe and yet ſublime ſpeculations, we may add the diſcovery of printing; an event more intereſting, perhaps, than any other inventions, however pro-

found be their principles, and however extenſive their application; for by this diſcovery knowledge is ſpread through a wide extent: every uſeful or ingenious effort of the underſtanding is preſerved as a model for imitation, or an incentive to improvement: above all, an impregnable barrier ſeems to be fixed againſt the return of general ignorance and barbariſm, and thoſe dreadful revolutions which have ſometimes ſwept away the labours of former ages, and plunged even enlightened nations into ſudden and hopeleſs darkneſs.

But the reſearches of Chriſtian nations have not been confined only to thoſe topics which merely exerciſe curioſity, or excite admiration; on the contrary, utility has been united with truth, as well in the ſtudies of the few, as in the experience of the many. To the affairs of men, as well as to the abſtractions of philoſophy, the ſpirit of ſcience has among ourſelves been applied: the principles of

govern-

government and the rights of men have been aſcertained; the limits of power and obedience have been defined; and the rights of nations, no longer repoſed upon the inſecure foundation of habit or opinion, have under the influence of philoſophy acquired the clearneſs of demonſtration, and the firmneſs of principle. Since the æra of their improvement, the nations of Chriſtianity have emulated each other in their progreſs towards refinement. The moſt honourable triumphs, and the moſt favourite ſubjects of congratulation, have been thoſe of learning and ſcience; and the glory moſt ardently coveted and moſt readily beſtowed, has been that of diſſeminating truth and knowledge amongſt mankind. Every ſucceeding age has marked the increaſe of their acquiſitions and the extenſion of their views. The flame of ſcience, when once kindled, has pervaded every deſcription of men, among whom Chriſtianity has been known; and nations who were once ſevered from the knowledge of the world

by the ignorance and barbarity in which they were involved, have now riſen into diſtinction, and aſſumed their place among the enlightened diviſions of mankind.

Through the whole ſcheme of his moral government the Deity has connected by ſecret ties the future and preſent intereſts of men; and conſequently has made the efforts of human wiſdom the inſtruments of a wider and more vigorous efficacy to his own extraordinary interpoſitions.

In various degrees, indeed, and under various circumſtances, the vices and the virtues, the ignorance and the knowledge of men are ſubſervient to his unſearchable purpoſes, they form a part of one great and ſolid chain which our reaſon cannot meaſure; and long after their efficacy is thought by ſuperficial obſervers to be exhauſted, we are led to trace their neceſſary connection with events very remote in time and very diſſimilar in kind.

When

When the goſpel was introduced into the world, the diſpenſations of heaven were, moſt of them, ſupernatural; and conſiſtently with the mode of procedure at this juncture, *the fooliſh things of the world were appointed to confound the wiſe.* But the propriety of this appointment is evinced, and its very ſucceſs confirmed by a ſubſequent ſtate of things, in which extraordinary meaſures are no longer requiſite: and thus with a conſiſtence which marks every ſucceſſive ſtage of God's deſigns, as they gradually unfold themſelves to our view, the goſpel was left to be eſtabliſhed and diſſeminated by thoſe moral cauſes, by which the viſible courſe of things is regulated. We therefore not only admit that the Deity does, but we infer from every known principle of moral fitneſs, that he would ſupport the goſpel; and draw out the full effects which it is capable of producing, by the aid of ſecondary and human means, by learning, by civilization, and government,

to the improvement of which the goſpel itſelf has indirectly contributed.

From theſe obſervations we may ſee the conſummate propriety of thoſe different means which God employs in different ſituations of things to carry on the ſame general deſign, ſometimes uſing preternatural, and ſometimes natural means: ſometimes working by the weakneſs of man, and ſometimes by his ſtrength; and always acting for the nobleſt ends, by means the moſt proper.

Every new religion muſt be ſuppoſed to counteract the reigning prejudices and vices of the times; and conſequently no objection ariſes againſt its credibility, from the evils to which it for a time expoſes thoſe perſons who have the honeſty to profeſs, and the courage to diffuſe it. But when the ſame religion is once eſtabliſhed, a ſpecies of proof is required, the very reverſe of that which was before neceſſary.

On the firſt appearance of the goſpel, we find the evidence of it in the patience of thoſe who encountered every temporal evil for its ſake. During the continuance of that goſpel in the world at large, we obtain other evidences of its divine original, by the ſhare it has in promoting the temporal good of thoſe who profeſs it.

When therefore any religion is, as it were, incorporated with the ordinary providence of God in his moral government, the credibility of it may in a great meaſure be determined by its actual and viſible influence on the welfare of mankind. Though ultimately directed to higher ends, it is ſtill relative to the conſtitution and circumſtances of man; and as its beſt evidence muſt ariſe from the conformity it has to the attributes of the Deity, it is difficult to conceive how any religion can be ſuppoſed to derive its origin from him, which is hoſtile to the temporal happineſs of thoſe to whom it

is given. The being whom it is the object of his gracious will to bleſs in a future exiſtence, it ſeems not conſiſtent with his wiſdom to oppreſs, or deceive in the preſent. Much therefore would thoſe doctrines want of their beſt evidence, which, while they pretended to miniſter to the future welfare of mankind, were inſtrumental, now, only in their degradation or their ruin.

Whether in the nature of the Mahometan and Chriſtian religions there be any permanent cauſes of this diverſity in their effects, affords a ſubject of very important and ſerious inveſtigation: and if it can be ſhewn, that the one is naturally deſtructive of the great principles of human welfare, and the other as naturally conducive to them, it is to be preſumed that no mean confirmation will thus ariſe of their reſpective falſehood and truth.

The immediate end of religion, is to prepare mankind for a future ſtate; but

in the proſecution of this end, there is a collateral effect, which it unavoidably has upon the temporal character of man. The doctrines which it teaches, and the precepts which it preſcribes, while they are relative to the diviſion of his INTELLECTUAL and MORAL Powers, affect alſo their nature and extent: hence that religion will moſt effectually conduce to the welfare of man, which moſt invigorates and enlarges theſe capacities of his mind.

The influence of religious perſuaſion muſt always be great either in improving, or contracting, the Faculties of the Underſtanding. Opinions which are the firſt received and the laſt parted with: which are united with all the hopes and all the fears of humanity; which are ſeldom doubted of by men of common ſenſe, and ſeldom improved by men of common attainments, cannot be ſuppoſed to be indifferent in their effects upon the mind.

The underſtanding is equally ſubject to habits, with our other powers; and according to the manner in which it has been exerciſed, or to the reach and extent which its has acquired in its common exerciſes, will be its exertion and character in every other employment. The votary of a weak or narrow ſuperſtition, which exhibits it Gods in the ſhape, and endows them with the paſſions of mankind; he whoſe mind has been accuſtomed to no higher forms of excellence, and to no brighter objects of contemplation than the doctrines which ſuch a religion affords, cannot eaſily be imagined to poſſeſs an underſtanding much elevated or improved; and will not carry to other employments that liberal and enlightened ſpirit which rational ſpeculations excite and confirm. So far as the influence of its truths upon his underſtanding extends, his religion will tend to contract it; the difficulties which oppoſe its progreſs will be ſo far increaſed, as its former habits have blinded or weakened it; and amidſt this general

ral depreſſion, it can only reſume its powers, when ſome unuſual and important concern calls them forth, and leads them beyond the limits which had been formerly impoſed to them. A religion, on the contrary, which exhibits ſublime objects of contemplation; which arrays its Deity in every poſſible excellence; and which mingles none of the infirmities of man with the perfections of heaven; may naturally be ſuppoſed to improve and to exalt the human underſtanding. By giving it in its common and permanent employments an object of tranſcendental excellence and magnitude, by accuſtoming it to high ideas of wiſdom and perfection, it muſt even inſenſibly have an influence in ſtamping a ſimilar character on all its exertions; and while to the mind and views of the philoſopher it affords a portion of the ſame ſublimity and ſpirit, to the common habits of opinion alſo it communicates ſomewhat of the ſame extent, and marks with bolder features the general character.

But the great influence of religious opinion upon the powers of the human underſtanding, ariſes from the information which it gives to man of his nature and end. All excellence is relative to the ſituation in which it is ſhewn; and before any kind of ambition can be excited, it is firſt neceſſary to know what it is that ambition can attain.

In the ordinary buſineſs of life the exertions of mankind are proportioned to the probability of ſucceſs. No greater induſtry is exerted, and no greater variety of intelligence acquired, than what ſeems neceſſary for the ſtation in which it is probably to be brought into uſe. The differences of fortune and condition thus in a very obvious manner affect the capacities, or acquiſitions of the mind. The poſſeſſor of rank and opulence, who is raiſed by fortune to the higher conditions and the greater duties of life, feels himſelf called upon for wider views and more liberal accompliſhments than the generality of mankind:

kind: and if he poſſeſſes the common ambition of his ſtation, he will proportion his efforts to the opportunities which are offered to him, and to the expectations which are formed of him. The poor man, on the contrary, concerning whom no ſuch expectations are entertained, and whoſe life is probably to be paſſed in domeſtic duties and corporeal labour, as naturally accommodates his mind to the ſituation in which he is to act; and ſeldom is ſolicitous about any acquiſitions either of knowledge or of virtue, which are not demanded by his condition: and thus the inequalities of rank and of fortune, which are produced by the improvements of ſociety, have a natural and obvious tendency either to exalt, or to depreſs the capacities of their poſſeſſors, and to adapt all their exertions to the ſituation in which they are to be employed. It is in the ſame manner that religion operates on the mind of man. From religion only he learns what are the final views and expectations of his being; for what purpoſe

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his mental powers were given; to what ends they lead; and what higher degrees of excellence they may yet receive. He will, therefore, be led to accommódate his ambition and his defires to the ſenſe he poſſeſſes of his nature. The conſciouſneſs of greater capacity for virtue, will be attended with a ſtronger ſenſe of obligation to become virtuous.

To the poor native of unenlightened countries, what motives can his religion afford to excite the ardour, or the activity of his mind? The ſervice of Deities, little elevated above the rank of man, cannot much improve his opinion of the conſequence of his being, or animate his deſire of their favour; and a long Futurity to be paſſed in the ſame occupations which now engage him, or in the narrow circle of animal enjoyment, cannot produce in him any higher conceptions of the dignity of his nature, or animate him to the exertion of any other powers, than thoſe that are to be employed in the life for which he

he thinks himſelf deſtined. Little raiſed in his purſuits above animal life, he will have ſomething contracted and abject in all his hopes. He ſees before him an indiſtinct proſpect of happineſs in corporeal indulgence, or indolent repoſe: he therefore is prompted by inſtinct, and directed even by reaſon, to accommodate himſelf to this deſtiny of his nature; and he thinks it folly and deluſion to diſquiet himſelf about any higher purſuits than thoſe in which Eternity ſeems to be engaged. No views of mental improvement have ever dawned upon his mind; and he leaves the world, as he enters it, ignorant of all the nobler capacities of his nature, and uninſtructed in the dignity of his being by thoſe religious encouragements and aſſiſtances, which alone could inſtruct him.

How different is the influence of enlightened religion? Taught by this, man becomes acquainted with the character of his being. Regarding himſelf no longer as the grovelling inhabitant of earth, he ex-

extends his hopes beyond the reach of animal enjoyment. He finds himſelf deſtined to immortal life; he feels himſelf endued with the capacity of eternal happineſs. To this ſublime end his mind almoſt involuntarily endeavours to adapt itſelf. His imagination, his underſtanding, his heart aſſume new energy and extent, as they are employed on ſo boundleſs a ſcene. And while he looks forward to thoſe bright proſpects which religion unfolds to his view, ſentiments of conſcious dignity inſinuate themſelves into his mind, ſo as to purify his taſte, and exalt his deſires above the groſs and fleeting pleaſures of this terreſtrial ſtate.

It requires no uncommon effort of ſagacity to diſcover the wide difference that ſubſiſts between the religions of Mahomet and Chriſt in their influence on the conceptions of the imagination, and the direction of the appetites. The doctrines which the prophet of Arabia has taught concerning the divine perfections, too frequently

quently accord with the loweſt ideas of the human mind; and though they are at times illuminated by ſublime or magnificent images, yet many of the ſuppoſed beauties of the Koran conſiſt rather in the brilliancy of the language than in the majeſty of the thought. How much Mahomet was indebted to the writings of the Prophets and of the Evangeliſts for the greater part of what is ſublime or beautiful in his theology, his compoſitions declare: but with this ſacred and hallowed imagery he blended the impure ſuperſtitions and groſs conceptions of his countrymen. For the wild profuſion and incongruous mixture of abſurdity and ſenſe which pervade his writings, it is ſcarcely poſſible to account on any other ſuppoſition than the natural incapacity even of the wiſeſt man to form upon every ſubject, and to preſerve upon every occaſion, juſt and conſiſtent notions of the divine perfections.

In what glowing colours is the greatneſs of the Deity diſplayed almoſt in the commencement of the Koran? And with what zeal does the imagination go along with deſcriptions, which ſeem ſo ſuited to the ſupreme dignity of his nature, and the glorious excellence of his works? Yet hardly is this enthuſiaſm excited before all the ardours of the mind are repreſſed, when we find this ſublime Being deſcend to the meaneſt and moſt contemptible employments; preſcribing laws which miniſter more to the appetites than to the intereſts of men; and regulating with the ſame care at one moment the order of ſecret and impure enjoyment, and in the next the diſcipline in which men are to be trained for eternity.

In the compoſition of the fanatical impoſtor credulity is often intermixed with craft. The fervors which are at firſt aſſumed voluntarily and inſidiouſly, return by a kind of mechanical force: in proceſs

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of time the glow of his fancy and the tumult of his paſſions are no longer artificial but real: and in this laſt ſtage of depravity combined with folly, the enthuſiaſt is inſeparably blended with the hypocrite in the whole maſs of character; and in the ſame action we may diſcover the wilineſs of the one, and the weakneſs of the other. Hence the inconſiſtencies of Mahomet are to be aſcribed, partly to cunning in accommodating his doctrines to the prejudices of other men, and partly to fanaticiſm, which prevented him from controuling the impetuous, but uncertain ſallies of his own mind.

Hence the God of Abraham and of Moſes, the incomprehenſible Being, who, in the language of Iſaiah, *liveth from eternity to eternity*, is aſſociated with the groſs and limited attributes of Eaſtern idolatry; and the altar which is erected to the Father of univerſal nature, is commanded to be approached with the ſlaviſh rites of a timorous and abject ſuperſtition.

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Of that eternity, the repreſentation of which form ſo great a part of every religion, the ideas which Mahomet has given, are not more pure or more conſiſtent. Of ſuch a ſyſtem of opinions ſo perplexed by inconſiſtency, and ſo debaſed by impurity, the effect upon the mind is obvious. Though all men probably can feel the ſublimity of thoſe deſcriptions which ſometimes occur, yet the impreſſion is momentary: but the apprehenſions which are entertained of the Deity from his agency, and the conceptions, which are formed of Futurity from its employments, are permanent. The beauties of the Koran may captivate the fancy; but its errors at once delude the judgment, degrade the ſpirit, and pollute the affections. How can the follower of Mahomet, therefore, feel any enlargement given to his underſtanding from repreſentations of a Deity, who though ſometimes eloquently or magnificently deſcribed, is yet familiarized to his apprehenſion in the character of an impure or capri-

capricious being? How can he be excited to the exerciſe or improvement of the higher powers of his nature, by the views which his religion affords him of a Futurity in which theſe powers ſeem to be unemployed; in which the enjoyments of animal pleaſure form a great part of the reward aſſigned to virtue; and to the reliſh of which no other preparation ſeems neceſſary, than to aſſimilate the mind to an ambition as limited, and to deſires as impure?

Though the exiſtence of a Deity has been admitted as well in the darkeſt as the moſt enlightened ages; and though it is equally ſupported by the teſtimony of tradition and the authority of reaſon; yet the ideas entertained of his attributes have been much diverſified by various cauſes in the conſtitution of men's minds, or in the circumſtances of their ſituation. The Northern nations, fierce and unpoliſhed in their manners, aſſailed by the ſeverities of an inclement ſky, and habituated to the

contemplation of deary waſtes or rugged mountains have arrayed their deities in every terrible quality. Among the inhabitants of the Eaſt, whoſe tempers ſeem to be caſt in a ſofter mould, and whoſe ſenſes are accuſtomed to more delicate and more beautiful proſpects of nature, the characters of their Gods wear a lovelier aſpect. The ſame propenſity in the worſhipper to aſſimilate the object of his worſhip to his own ruling paſſions, or his own favourite tenets, may be traced through individuals and ſects. The God of the benevolent man is, in his contemplation, ſurrounded with the mild luſtre of benevolence: the God of the malignant is ſeen only with frowns of diſpleaſure, and armed with the thunderbolt of vengeance. In the Deity of Zeno we perceive much of the ſullen dignity and harſh inflexibility, in which the philoſopher himſelf placed the ſupreme good; and upon the ſame principles Epicurus aſcribed to his Gods that exemption from the ſolicitude of care, and the buſtle of activity, which he repreſented as eſſen-

eſſential to happineſs, both human and divine. But in the God whom Chriſtians are commanded to adore, none of thoſe imperfections can be diſcerned, which are uſually and juſtly imputed to peculiar ſentiments of individuals, or the general habits of nations. Without the jargon of ſcience, and without the rant of enthuſiaſm, he is preſented to us with all the perfections which were ever aſſigned to the divinity, by the reaſon of the contemplative philoſopher, or the fancy of the enraptured poet.

And here it well deſerves our notice, that while the human underſtanding has been chiefly employed in inveſtigating the *abſolute* exiſtence of God's attributes, divine revelation uſually exhibits them in a *relative*, and therefore a more intelligible and more intereſting point of view. He is our Father, by whom we are protected; he is our Counſellor by whom we are inſtructed in the duties of our ſtation; he is our Judge by whom we ſhall be hereafter

exalted to the nobleſt enjoyments, or condemned to the moſt dreadful torments. Do not theſe repreſentations of the Deity, paſs more eaſily into the underſtanding, and work more forcibly on the affections, than the profoundeſt reſearches of philoſophers into the nature of infinity, or the moſt ſolid chain of arguments on the connection of cauſe and effect? Indeed the ſacred writers are always more intent on ſanctifying our hearts, than on amuſing our imagination. Hence they abound with ſuch repreſentations of our creator, as are likely to produce not tranſient and wild admiration, but calm and permanent confidence. Hence too, the attributes of God are ſo frequently and ſo pertinently united with the duties of man. Inſtead of bewildering us in intricate and abſtruſe ſpeculations upon unity, they tell us that we are *to worſhip the Lord our God, and him only we are to ſerve.* Inſtead of multiplying curious and diſputable diſtinctions about the abſtract eſſence, and the negative or poſitive properties of ſpiritual and corpo-

corporeal beings, they emphatically pronounce *God to be a ſpirit*; and to this ſpeculative dogma they inſtantly affix a practical precept; for we are therefore *to worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth.*

Before this audience it would be unneceſſary for me to enlarge on the doctrine of tutelary deities, which ſeems to have prevailed in every country, and of which numberleſs inſtances are recorded in ſacred and profane writings. But the uncontrouled, the unrivalled, and the undivided power; the univerſal preſence, and unceaſing agency of the true God, are again and again aſſerted in the ſcriptures. He is *Alpha and Omega*; *the beginning and the end.* He is the *Father of light, with whom there is no variableneſs, neither ſhadow of turning.* He is the creator and ruler of all things, *in whom are hidden all the treaſures of wiſdom*; the patient maſter, who is willing *that all ſhould come to repentance*; the juſt God, who will *reward every man according to his works*; the gracious

and merciful God, *who gave his only begotten ſon, that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life.* What, I beſeech you, can be more convincing to our judgment, or more improving to our hearts, than theſe repreſentations of the Deity? Do they not invite us to confidence, as well as humble us into fear? Meditation on ſuch a Being, ſo conſtantly and ſo wonderfully employed in promoting the good of his creatures, tends ſurely to cruſh every ſelfiſh, and to enlarge every generous affection of the ſoul. It exalts the dignity of our nature, when we conceive ourſelves capable of obtaining his approbation; it ſoftens the heart into compaſſion, and expands it into benevolence, when we conſider mankind as framed and ſupported by the ſame Almighty power, redeemed by the ſame goodneſs, and intended together with ourſelves for the ſame glorious and *incorruptible inheritance in heaven.* The pride of knowledge, the ſplendor of conqueſt, and the pageantry of power ſhrink into ob-

ſcurity and inſignificance, when we reflect on him *whom the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain.* All the lurking impurities of our ſouls are ſeen with loathing, and all the ſecret crimes of our lives remembered with horror, while we conſider that he *tries the very heart and reins, and that his eye ſeeth afar off.* All the dark and tempeſtuous ſcenes of the world ceaſe to alarm and depreſs us, adverſity loſes her ſting, and proſperity aſſumes new and more delightful charms, when we conſider that no event takes place without the appointment of our maker, *that not a ſparrow falleth to the ground* without his notice, and that in his ſight *we are of more value than many ſparrows.*

In reſpect to a Future Life, the belief of it has, we know, prevailed almoſt univerſally, and yet as to the particular kinds and degrees of enjoyment reſerved for us, nations and individuals have differed widely from each other. The In-

dian enfeebled by age, or tortured by ſickneſs, gladly reſigns his breath, in hopes of receiving again the bow by which he had gained his ſuſtenance, and deſtroyed his enemies; and meeting again the dog, who had been the faithful companion of his dangers and his toils. The hardy warrior of the North welcomed the hour of death, which was to carry him into the hall of Odin, where, in his imagination, the ghoſts of departed heroes were permitted to remember and to celebrate the exploits performed on earth, and to quaff the moſt delicious liquor from the ſkulls of the foes, whom they had ſlain in battle. Virgil deſcribes his heroes as engaged in the ſame purſuits, and attached to the ſame pleaſures, which had been long familiarized and endeared to them in their former exiſtence [b]. Mahomet too,

[b] Pars in gramineis exercent membra palæſtris,
Contendunt ludo, et fulva luctantur arena.
Pars pedibus plaudunt choreas, et carmina dicunt.
——————— Quæ gratia currûm
Armorumque fuit vivis, quæ cura nitentes
Paſcere equos; eadem ſequitur tellure repôſtos.
Æneid. vi.

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as we have ſeen, in the ſenſual paradiſe which he announced, prepared for his followers, ſcenes of the moſt alluring voluptuouſneſs.

Now, whatever allowance the man of deep reflection may make for the ignorance and ſuperſtition of barbarous countries, and whatever entertainment the man of refined taſte may derive from the compoſitions of more enlightened writers, both ſurely will agree in approving the ſilence of the ſcriptures as to the particular ſtate of things in a future life.

Reaſon informs us, that the preſent is a probationary ſtate of diſcipline; and in conformity to ſuch a ſtate, religion adapts all her doctrines to faith, all her encouragements to hope, and all her regulations to practice. Chriſtianity holding up to us the proſpect of our future exiſtence, bids us now prepare for it by virtuous habits of thought and action; and philoſophy will informs us, that thoſe habits

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in a great ſcheme of moral government, are neither recommended by the creator, nor acquired by the creature in vain. We are therefore to believe, that a real, an intimate, and moſt important connection ſubſiſts between the preſent life and that which is to follow it; though it ſurpaſs our abilities to explain, and perhaps to comprehend, the particular powers with which we ſhall be inveſted, and the particular agency in which we are to be employed. Chriſtianity may then be excuſed for not gratifying our curioſity on ſubjects to which our apprehenſions are now utterly inadequate; and even were they more adequate, it would deſerve our praiſe for informing us of what is true, that we are deſtined for immortality; and for inſtructing us in what is moſt important, the duties by which we are to gain it. From ſome paſſages in the ſcriptures it may be inferred, that our moral purſuits and our intellectual endowments will bear ſome reſemblance to the preſent: and on this ſuppoſition is founded the neceſ-

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ſity of regulating the one by the ſtricteſt virtue, and of improving the other by the ſublimeſt knowledge. In favour of this inference from the ſacred writings, analogy certainly pleads. Children are poſſeſſed of powers and affections, which are in proceſs of time to be drawn out into action; upon the right uſe of which depends their happineſs or their miſery, and in the cultivation of which, therefore, they are aſſiſted at a time when they cannot look forward either to the end for which they are to act, or to the connection of that end with the means that are now taking to enable them to act well. In the ſame manner we are training up to habits, and exerciſing powers, which are to acquire new vigour, and to operate through a wider ſphere, *when this corruptible ſhall have put on incorruption.* Certainly we are not juſtified in expecting that indolent repoſe, in which an Epicurean would place his felicity, or thoſe rapturous and fervent devotions, in which *alone* the Enthuſiaſt ſuppoſes the joys of the

the bleſſed to conſiſt: much leſs are we authorized to look for ſenſual gratifications, or the gaudy trappings of wealth and power.

The policy, or the pride of the Greeks and Romans, often induced them to confine the rewards of Eternity to the few who acted with ſplendor on the public theatre of life; to wiſe legiſlators, to valiant heroes, and mighty conquerors. But the goſpel announces reſurrection and judgement, together with the happineſs or miſery that are to follow them, to men of all ages, and all countries, of all capacities and all ſtations. It offers the bright recompence of *a crown that fadeth not away*, as well to the ſilent and ſolid virtues of meekneſs and charity, as to the more ſhining and exalted excellencies of valour in a juſt cauſe, and the diſintereſted love of our country. It does not confound and weary the underſtanding, by repreſenting the various ſtages of our being as reſulting from a long train of phyſical

phyſical cauſes, which God has appointed, and which affect each other by ſecret but uninterrupted ties; but it exhibits the doctrine of Futurity continually and profeſſedly in a moral, and therefore a more uſeful point of view. It tells us that *the things which are ſeen, and are temporal,* have a reference to thoſe things *which are not ſeen, and are eternal:* and that in both the ſame glorious deſign is uniformly carried on. It connects what we are to practiſe with what we are to believe; and thus extends the influence of Futurity over our ſocial and religious relations, over our conduct in private and public life, and even over our words and thoughts. Such is the effect of Chriſtianity with regard to its doctrine of *a judgment to come.* And as to the happineſs which is to ſucceed that judgment, it ſtill holds the ſame firm but unadorned language; and ſtill directs all its declarations to the ſame great and good purpoſe, of *making us wiſe unto ſalvation.* Thus we are told, that *this mortal ſhall*

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put on immortality; we are encouraged to hope for admiſſion into the preſence of *the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect*; we are to ſee the everlaſting God, *face to face, and know him, even as we are known.*

In theſe repreſentations there are no impure or fantaſtic ideas: all is ſimple, yet majeſtic; all is wonderful, yet credible; all is captivating, and at the ſame time inſtructive.

When the actions of every day and every hour have this intimate connection with our eternal doom, is it not to be expected, that religion will have a forcible and conſtant influence over our lives? That influence, it muſt be confeſſed, is often counteracted by our infirmities, our prepoſſeſſions, and our headſtrong appetites. Yet Chriſtianity far ſurpaſſes every other religion in its viſible tendency to make us better men, and in its real effects upon the ſentiments and the manners of mankind. Every inſtance of improve-

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ment which this diſcourſe is intended to point out, as reſulting from Chriſtianity, in government, laws, and ſciences, may be conſidered as a perſumptive argument of its efficacy in matters purely of a religious nature: the ſame commands and the ſame ſanctions, which have quickened the efforts of men in ſecuring their ſpiritual well-being, have been indirectly the inſtruments of increaſing their temporal. The ſame expectation of a righteous judgment which makes us good men, tends at the ſame time to make us uſeful and ornamental members of ſociety. The ſame elevation of mind which actuates the boſom of a being, who reveres himſelf as the heir of immortal life, inſpires every noble ſentiment, and animates to every arduous undertaking, which can adorn and dignify human nature in this ſtate of mortality.

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SERMON IX.

PART II.

MATT. VII. 16.

Ye ſhall know them by their fruits.

IN the former part of this Diſcourſe we have endeavoured to contraſt the very different effects which the religions of Mahomet and Chriſt naturally produce on the HUMAN UNDERSTANDING: we now proceed to examine their influence on the MORAL POWERS of Man.

The influence of religion upon the Moral powers of man, ſeems to be even more important than that which it has upon the powers of his Under-

ſtanding. Upon the latter it operates only by diſtant and inſenſible degrees; and produces its effect rather by eſtabliſhing its habits, than by altering its conſtitution. But upon the former its influence is immediate. Aſſuming an authority which ſuperſedes every other law of his nature, and ſpeaking to him with a voice which commands his obedience and aſſent, it is able to mould the opinions and purpoſes of his being; and to ſuit every ſentiment of his heart to the rules it preſcribes. What is right or wrong, what is fit for him to purſue or proper to avoid, it can eſtabliſh with higher ſanctions, than the deductions of reaſon, or the conſciouſneſs of feeling can claim; and the voice of nature, when oppoſed to its commands, is either awed into ſilence, or ſinks into neglect.

On the nature, therefore, of religion depends in a great meaſure the Moral character of man. The doctrines which it teaches, and the precepts which it enjoins,

joins, muſt in every inſtance, determine his opinions and his conduct: and as, when united with the intereſts of mankind, they may be ſuppoſed to give a more powerful motive to his exertions and his humanity; ſo, when oppoſed to them, they are able to vanquiſh every inſtinct of his nature, and to ſtamp with the ſemblance of virtue whatever is hurtful to his kind.

The moral influence of any ſyſtem of opinions depends upon their relation to the welfare of mankind; and in judging of them, we determine their utility by the nature of the *general Spirit* they inculcate, and the *particular Duties* they enjoin. Upon whatever principle the Nature of virtue is reſted, its End ſeems uniformly to be ſuppoſed in the production of general good: and whatever may be the character of any particular Duty, the principle upon which it is approved, is its relation to this End. Every ſyſtem

of religious opinion, therefore, will improve the moral powers of man, in proportion as the Spirit which it inculcates, is that of general humanity; and as the Duties which it enjoins, are in themſelves beneficial.

In reviewing the general hiſtory of religion, we obſerve a corruption and weakneſs in the nature of man, which has too often rendered both the Spirit which it eſtabliſhes, and the Duties which it preſcribes, prejudicial to the welfare of humanity.

The poſſeſſion of divine favour, and of peculiar inſpiration, with which ſo many nations ſo often and ſo falſely have flattered themſelves, inſtead of inſpiring ſentiments of compaſſion or humanity for thoſe whom heaven had leſs diſtinguiſhed; or of exciting that pious gratitude which naturally unites itſelf with bene-

benevolence and pity towards the ignorant and the deceived; has in general been productive only of arrogance and inhumanity; of a ſpirit at the ſame time preſumptuous in its eſtimate of its own claims to favour, and uncharitable in its interpretation of thoſe of other men. To be the favoured of heaven, is the diſtinction moſt grateful to the imaginations of men: and while it inſenſibly unites with private and national pride, it ſeems to juſtify that ſenſe of ſuperiority, which men are at all times diſpoſed to entertain of themſelves and of their nation. The reſt of mankind, involved in ignorance, or deluded by error, appear the objects of a pity which borders upon contempt; and their unwillingneſs to deſert ſuperſtitions which ſeem ſo abſurd, or to receive truths which ſeem ſo plain, appears to imply a barbarity which it is proper to deſpiſe, or an obſtinacy which it is juſt to correct. The gloom in which heaven leaves them to wander, is ſometimes

thought to indicate ſome original inferiority in their nature, or ſome acquired depravity which the Deity deſigns to puniſh: and in either caſe he ſeems to eſtabliſh a boundary by which his choſen and favoured people are ſeparated from thoſe impure and corrupted nations, who are the enemies of divine truth, or the objects of divine wrath.

Wherever men have acted, theſe prejudices have in ſome degree influenced their conduct. The ſpirit of religious zeal has increaſed the ſtrength, and ſharpened the aſperity of national animoſity: and the principles of peace and humanity, upon which the public welfare of mankind is repoſed, have been ſeen to periſh under the influence of opinions, which in the mercies of heaven have found a warrant for cruelty, and which make us perceive in man only the enemy of man.

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Whatever has been the character of religion, the ſame Spirit of party and hoſtility ſeems to have animated its profeſſors. Under every different climate, and amidſt every diſſimilarity of manners; in the mild and peaceful doctrines of Brama, as well as in the ruder ſyſtems of Northern ſuperſtition; the temporal influence of religion, by the regulations of private intercourſe, as well as by the injunction of open hoſtility, has operated ſo as to divide mankind from each other, and to eſtabliſh permanent barriers to their commerce and their improvement. And if in any periods of the hiſtory of human affairs more liberal principles ſeem to have counteracted this fatal infirmity, they are to be found by broken and indiſtinct traces in the ages of ancient polytheiſm, under the influence of religions too groſs to intereſt the vanity, or to awaken the paſſions of mankind: and too much diverſified in their objects, to excite either zeal or reſolution in their ſupport.

The ſame weakneſs which has thus corrupted the *general Spirit* of religion, ſeems alſo to have affected the *peculiar Duties* it preſcribes; and by the unaccountable perverſeneſs of human nature even the *particular Virtues* it has enjoined, have too often become not leſs adverſe to the welfare of men than the *general character* which it has eſtabliſhed.

That purity of life is the beſt tribute which can be offered to the Deity, is the doctrine indeed of reaſon, but ſeems not in general to have influenced the conduct of reaſonable beings. The pleaſures which the conſtitution of humanity has annexed to the performance of moral duty, appear to connect it too intimately with our intereſt to render it a voluntary or acceptable offering: and the pious mind, oppreſſed with the ſenſe of divine favour, and animated with the ambition of diſplaying its gratitude, ſeeks naturally for ſurer and ſeverer proofs of its thankfulneſs and its devotion. Amidſt auſterities

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and mortifications, its piety ſeems beſt to be evinced: to the ſenſual and impure gratifications of the preſent life, it appears unſeemly for the imagination which is converſant in divine meditation, to deſcend; and the ſacrifice of all that miniſters to the comfort or enjoyment of a temporal being, is conſidered as the fit purchaſe of the joys of immortality, and as the ſole diſcipline in which the mind can be trained for its pure enjoyments.

The maſs of mankind, indeed, ſeldom ſhare in this ſublime infirmity. But other paſſions, more ſuited to their character and habits, unhappily co-operate with this pious prejudice, and aſſiſt it in the ſeparation of moral duty from religious obedience. What to the pure and upright mind ſeems too eaſy a ſervice, is to the corrupted and ſenſual a bondage too ſevere to be borne. The reſtraints of paſſion, the denial of appetite, the calm perſeverance

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of virtuous conduct, are severities which the generality of mankind have neither tempers resolute enough to practise, nor imaginations pure enough to comprehend. But the observance of the forms, and the infliction of the austerities of superstition all men can practise. They require not a permanent, but a temporary mortification: they exhaust not the imagination by demanding its constant employment on those high and mysterious subjects to which the mind approaches with dread; but adapt themselves to those occasional seasons of despondence or apprehension, when men seek to make their peace with God: and while they persuade the sinner, that by this voluntary punishment he has expiated his errors and his crimes, they seem to bid him return again into the world, and relapse into the indulgence of all his desires.

While mankind are thus disposed, by some secret kind of infirmity, to the corruption

ruption of religion, a ſyſtem of religious opinions which falls in with theſe prejudices, and avails itſelf of them, cannot but be hurtful to the moral character and capacities of man. With this fatal influence it is eaſy to perceive that Mahometaniſm is attended: and while it aſſumes to itſelf the high pretenſion of divine original, both the *Spirit* which it inculcates, and the *Duties* which it preſcribes, are nearly as adverſe to the welfare of humanity, as the rudeſt forms of barbarous ſuperſtition.

To that religious pride which all men are diſpoſed to entertain, and which ſo often has covered the ſcene of their tranſactions with blood, the doctrines of Mahomet have afforded an encouragement and permanency, which is unprecedented even in the hiſtory of religious error. To the pious Muſſulman the reſt of mankind are proſcribed as the objects of his averſion or contempt: the hand of his prophet

phet has even marked repeatedly, and authoritatively, the limits within which his humanity ought to be employed; and to his eye the various multitudes who ſtand without this barrier, are blended under one common colouring of ignorance and oppoſition to the truth, and of hopeleſs excluſion from the knowledge of the divine will here, and the privileges of the divine favour hereafter. The ſword by which the conqueſts of the prophet were attained, and which far more effectually than the boldneſs of his pretenſions, or the wiſdom of his Koran, ſubdued the obſtinate prepoſſeſſions of his countrymen, is left as the moſt precious inheritance to the ſucceſſors of his power: and while their piety is united with their ambition and their pride, to the private Muſſulman the proſpect of eternal enjoyment is held out as the reward of his labours in the deſolation of humanity. The honour of his country, the ſucceſs of his faith, and the ſenſe of the importance and ſuperiority

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of his own character, are connected with this ſpirit of undiſtinguiſhing and uncontrouled hoſtility to the reſt of his ſpecies: and the ſame fatal deluſions which occaſionally deluged the Eaſt for ages in blood, have ſilently, but uniformly, operated upon the private ſentiments of men, ſo as to narrow their ſocial affections within the bounds of their own perſuaſion, and to create enemies in all that are not numbered under the banners of the prophet. While the religion of Mahomet thus naturally tends to divide mankind, whether as individuals or nations from each other; and while it checks the diffuſion of humanity by retarding the improvement and happineſs of human kind, its effects are not leſs malignant upon the moral character of man, by the rules and precepts it preſcribes. Of that liberal piety which is founded as well in the underſtanding as in the heart; which examines where it approves, and which diſplays the ſincerity of its approbation by rectitude of intention

tion and purity of conduct, the generality of mankind, from their contracted habits of thought, as well as their laborious ſtations in life, are in a great meaſure incapable. They indeed believe in a moral governor and judge of the univerſe: they reverence his attributes, and would conciliate his favour: but it accords better with their wiſhes and their prejudices, to confine the practice of religion to thoſe auſterities and forms, which require little mental purity, or intellectual exertion to perform. A religion, therefore, which avails itſelf of this infirmity, muſt neceſſarily be ſuppoſed to give a ſanction to theſe natural, though deſtructive errors, and to be productive of all the evils that reſult from them.

If it be true, as the enemies of revelation contend, that mankind are often not actuated by their principles, it is equally true, may the Chriſtian ſay, that they in few inſtances totally and deliberately renounce

renounce them. Error gains aſſent by the reſemblance it bears to truth; and ſuperſtition ſanctifies its uſurpations by urging ſome of thoſe claims, which true religion has ever employed with ſucceſs upon the common ſenſe of mankind. Hence no religion, be its promiſes ever ſo alluring, its ceremonies ever ſo frequent, and its injunctions ever ſo peremptory, can keep any firm hold on the reaſon or the imagination of men, unleſs it calls in the aid of the moral ſenſe, and recommends ſome duties which that ſenſe approves. Even the coarſeſt and moſt deſpicable ſyſtems of ſuperſtition pretend to give a greater or leſs ſanction to thoſe offices which the experience of men found neceſſary for the happineſs of that ſociety in which they aroſe: and therefore the diſtinction which lies between true and falſe religion, is this. That religion is falſe, which, profeſſing to be intended for the uſe of all nations, is diſtorted in its doctrines, and narrowed in its precepts, by the prejudices and manners

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of any one particular age and any one particular country. That religion is probably true, which challenging the enquiries, and demanding the obedience of every age and every country, is calculated to promote their temporal as well as eternal intereſt; to co-operate with every uſeful quality in their government, laws, and manners; and gradually to correct what ever is defective or injurious in them. But the general and vague recommendation of virtue forms no part of the *peculiar* character of *any* religion, ſince it is equally common to all. The influence of a religion upon morality is, therefore, to be determined by the relation which the peculiar duties it preſcribes, have to the general welfare of men; and the motives which of itſelf it affords to the diſcharge of thoſe grand and univerſal duties, which time and place may indeed modify in their degree, but without ſuſpending their obligation. Conſidered in this light, the religion of Mahomet preſents itſelf to

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us, as containing precepts more deſtructive, perhaps, to the well-being of mankind than are to be found in any other inſtance of religious deluſion. The Muſſulman is commanded, indeed, to be juſt and charitable; and this command every other religion, however falſe, would not fail to impoſe. But juſtice and charity form only a ſmall and ſubordinate part of his obedience. He muſt abſtain from the innocent enjoyment of the bounties of nature, with a rigour which leſſens the comforts of ſocial intercourſe, and even in ſome degree repreſſes the noble emotions of friendſhip and affection. He muſt approach the Deity, not at the ſeaſons of his own gratitude; but at preſcribed hours, which often arrive without the preparation of his heart; and which return with ſuch frequency, and muſt be practiſed with ſuch exactneſs, as tend ſurely to create oſtentatious hypocriſy, or abject puſillanimity; to ſlacken punctuality into indifference, or inflame zeal into fanaticiſm. In whatever ſituation he is placed, he muſt perform ablutions,

which often interfere with the practical duties of life; and of which the forms, and circumſtances would be ridiculous in the recital, if indeed they deſerved not a ſeverer appellation, when conſidered as the evidences of virtue and piety. To fill up the meaſure of his devotion, the Mahometan muſt leave his friends, his family and his country, and expoſe himſelf to the dangers of a tedious journey, through barren ſands and beneath a burning ſky, to viſit the Temple of Mecca, with ceremonies which alike corrupt the underſtanding, and degrade the dignity of a rational and immortal being.

Such are the duties to which the followers of Mahomet are bound; and little muſt the prophet have known of the human heart, if he imagined that the preſcription of ſuch a ritual was ſerviceable to the cauſe of real piety; if he believed that by the introduction of burthenſome ceremonies he inſured the ſincerity of religion; or if he ventured to hope, that

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any other conſequence could ariſe from ſuch precepts, than the obſervance of the forms of devotion without its ſpirit; and the confinement of the emotions of virtue to that preciſe limit within which they were circumſcribed.

But let us turn our eyes awhile from a proſpect ſo diſguſting.

To the narrow and ſelfiſh views of the Arabian impoſtor, and to the lifeleſs and unprofitable ceremonies which he appointed, let us oppoſe the ſublime and diſintereſted philanthropy of our holy religion, the ſimplicity of its precepts, and the connection even of its ceremonial ordinances with the practice of moral virtue. Unlike the confined and narrow inſtitutions of the Koran, the Goſpel of Chriſt breathes a ſpirit of benevolence as univerſal as it is pure. Unconnected with the machinations of human policy, or the ſchemes of human ambition, it propoſes to eſtabliſh no other kingdom, but that

of righteouſneſs and peace. No reſtrictions of national prejudices, no differences of religious opinion or modes of worſhip, are ſuffered to reſtrain its operation. The believer and the infidel, the friend and the enemy, are by a peculiarity which diſtinguiſhes Chriſtianity from every other religion, equally entitled to our good offices, and our prayers. In vain, therefore, will the faithful Muſſulman, the Roman patriot, or the Grecian moraliſt, contraſt their favourite virtues with that enlarged and comprehenſive charity, which embraces the whole race of men, and knows no bounds but thoſe which God has preſcribed to his creation. In the delightful exerciſe of theſe tranſcendent virtues, extended and exalted as they are by the religion of Jeſus, the pious Chriſtian finds no obſtruction from the obſervance of ceremonies devoid of uſe, and even of meaning. He is indeed directed to keep two ordinances, one of which is the mark of his admiſſion into the faith, the other of his continuance in it; yet to neither of

them, when unconnected with moral conduct, does the goſpel aſcribe either dignity or uſe. Both, on the contrary, involve a ſolemn promiſe of obedience to that law, which, as it was originally impreſſed by the Almighty on the heart of man, ſo has it been ſince finally ratified and illuſtrated by the revelation of Chriſt.

If ſuch is the faith which we profeſs; if it promotes every ſocial virtue in an extent unknown, not only to the Mahometan but even to every other religious ſyſtem; if its ceremonies are few and eaſy, and thoſe equally productive of the fear of God and the love of our fellow-creatures; if it binds together in the moſt powerful manner the intereſts of mankind with the duties of religion, ſhall we heſitate a moment to confeſs it a ſyſtem every way worthy of the infinite wiſdom which formed it; a ſyſtem, which if adhered to with zeal and ſincerity, would reconcile the views, and calm the animoſities which ſubſiſt in the world; would unite all man-

kind as partners in one common intereſt, and teach them to reſt their hopes of eternal happineſs in the next life on the practice of piety and moral rectitude in the preſent.

Such are the influences, which Mahometaniſm and Chriſtianity ſeverally have upon the human character; and ſuch the difference, which they would of themſelves naturally produce in the appearance of our temporal affairs, and the exertions of our moral powers. But though this diverſity of operation be obvious, it is neceſſary to remark, that this operation may not always be equally prominent, or equally intenſe; that other concurrent and collateral cauſes may, as well limit the tendency of the religion of Chriſt, as diminiſh the influence of Mahometan ſuperſtition. Religion, it is apparent, is not the only employment of the mind of man; a variety of other cauſes, in government, in climate, and manners, are conſtantly acting upon his powers, and faſhioning his cha-

character: and though a pure and ſublime religion has an evident and real tendency to exalt the capacities of his mind; yet a religion the moſt pure and ſublime may exiſt with a form of government ſo corrupt, or with a ſyſtem of manners ſo depraved, as to loſe a great part of its influence on the human mind. There are probably circumſtances in the conſtitution of European and Aſiatic governments, and ſtill more, it has been ſaid, in the different influences of their climate and ſituation, which prevent the religions by which they are diſtinguiſhed, from producing their full and natural effects upon the actions of thoſe who have embraced them: and if ſpeculations of this kind were the proper ſubjects of this place, it might not perhaps be difficult to ſhew, what are the cauſes which in one ſituation have prevented the rational and exalted theology of Chriſt from attaining its proper effect upon the character of thoſe who have adopted it as a rule of faith and conduct; and which on the other hand have reſcued

in part, the diſciples of Mahomet from the fatal influences of his doctrines. But it is ſufficient for me to have ſhewn the different tendency which theſe religions have, from their intrinſic and diſtinguiſhing properties, to affect our moral agency: and ſince every cauſe muſt be judged of by its proper effects, enough, I truſt, has been advanced to prove, that the one is naturally beneficial, and the other as naturally hurtful to the intellectual, the ſocial, and the religious character of man.

From a ſhort review of the ſubjects that have been diſcuſſed, and of the arguments that have been adduced in the courſe of theſe Lectures, the ſuperiority of the religion taught by Chriſt over that of Mahomet, will be ſufficiently apparent to juſtify our approbation of the one, and our rejection of the other. We firſt endeavoured to ſhew, that, as the Mahometan impoſture was indebted for its ſucceſs to cauſes viſibly and merely human,

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ſo the rapid propagation of Chriſtianity is to be referred chiefly to the immediate interpoſition of God; that the extent of a religion is not ſimply and independently of circumſtances a proof of its truth, and that upon the excluſion of this moſt neceſſary diſtinction, idolatry and heathenism may boaſt of higher triumphs over Mahometaniſm, than Mahometaniſm itſelf can [b], from the number of its adherents and the wide diffuſion of its doctrines, claim over Chriſtianity.

When the character of Mahomet was compared with the character of Chriſt, the contraſt was moſt ſtriking. In the pretended prophet of Arabia we diſcovered under the maſk of religious zeal the combined vices of luſt, cruelty, and worldly ambition in his motives; and of worldly craft in his meaſures. But

[b] It has been ſaid, that if we divide the known regions of the world into thirty equal parts, the Chriſtians will be found to be in poſſeſſion of five, the Mahometans of ſix, and the Idolaters of nineteen. See *Brerewood*, p. 79.

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in the bleſſed Redeemer of mankind we contemplated, with reverential love and gratitude, the moſt enlarged philanthropy united with the moſt ſublime devotion; a dignity tempered by meekneſs and an humility quite remote from meanneſs; a conſiſtency, which no variety of ſituation could ſhake; a diſintereſtedneſs which no temptations of ſecular glory could ſeduce; a fortitude, calm without inſenſibility, exemplary without oſtentation, and equally ſuperior to the afflictions of life, and to the tortures of death.

Mahometaniſm, we have ſeen, is totally unſupported by external evidence; while the credibility of the goſpel is atteſted by miracles which omnipotence alone could have performed; and by the prediction of events, which omniſcience alone could have foreſeen.

We have found that the Koran even refutes its own claim to a divine authority, as well by what it denies as by what

it concedes: that, conſidered in the light of a revelation to regulate our conduct, and to confirm our hopes, it was altogether unneceſſary; that it was true ſo far only as it adopted the doctrines of a preceding religion, and that where it differs from them, it is groſsly improbable, or evidently falſe; in ſhort, that in many inſtances it is unworthy of the wiſdom, and in ſome even irreconcileable to the goodneſs of God. To errors which our reaſon may detect, and to deformities at which our common ſenſe recoils, we oppoſed the purity and ſimplicity of the goſpel; its conſiſtence with the beſt diſcoveries of philoſophy, and the immutable laws of nature; its conformity to the moral precepts, and peculiar œconomy of the Moſaic ſyſtem; and finally the invariable agreement, in which its commands, its ſanctions, and its evidences ſtand with each other and with themſelves.

In the preſent Lecture the compariſon has

has been cloſed by an impartial conſideration of the effects which each religion either is calculated to produce, or actually has produced; effects, which, on the one ſide, are as deſtructive to the pretenſions of Mahometaniſm, as on the other they are honourable to the cauſe of Chriſtianity. Indeed the more attentively we conſider the impoſture of Mahomet, the more firmly ſhall we diſbelieve, and the more ſincerely muſt we deſpiſe it. But in proportion to the proofs which ſupport the goſpel, and the doctrines which it conveys, are brought to the teſt of hiſtorical or philoſophical criticiſm, the greater reaſon ſhall we have to felicitate ourſelves on our profeſſion of a religion, ſo adapted at once to the frailties and to the nobleſt capacities of our nature, and ſo friendly both to our temporal and eternal intereſts: a religion, which hitherto has reſiſted the ſullen obſtinacy of the Jew, the fierce hoſtility of the Mahometan, and the ſceptical ſubtlety of the infidel;

infidel; a religion, which is more approved as it is more underſtood, and againſt which the God who founded it, has expreſsly promiſed *that he will not ſuffer the gates of hell finally to prevail.*

To diſcover the credibility of the Chriſtian revelation, the diligent and honeſt uſe of our own underſtanding alone is requiſite. May the grace of God ſo ſanctify our hearts, that we may feel its importance in every period of our lives; that in the hour of death we may be ſuſtained by its comforts; and admitted to all its glorious privileges in the day of judgment.

While, however, we cleave to the truth, with ſteadineſs of judgment and in ſincerity of ſpirit, let us be diſpoſed to lament, rather than to rail at, the oppoſition of thoſe who have not been hitherto brought by the providence of God within the pale of the Chriſtian Church. Though juſtified in our own faith by the ſolemn teſtimony

teſtimony of our own conſciences, we are very incompetent judges of the known, as well as of many unknown difficulties, which, ariſing from early prepoſſeſſion, from habitual perſuaſion, from an honeſt dread of change in the awful concerns of religion, or from a reverential and fond attachment to the ſuppoſed virtues and ſanctity of their admired prophet, may have prevented the followers of Mahomet from yielding to arguments, which they are unable to confute. Though bound to accept with thankfulneſs the gracious offers of ſalvation which have been made to ourſelves, we cannot diſcern all the wiſe and excellent purpoſes, which the moral governor of the univerſe may ultimately accompliſh by the ignorance or errors, in which many of his creatures are yet involved. In reſpect therefore to the revelation which is calculated to enlighten that ignorance, and to reform thoſe errors, we act up to the full meaſure of our duty, if we embrace it without hypocriſy, if we defend it without bitterneſs,

neſs, and if, whilſt we labour to diſſeminate its glorious truths, we ſeriouſly endeavour to make it the rule of our own conduct, no leſs than of our belief. By theſe means we ſhall moſt effectually and moſt honourably adorn the religion we profeſs; we ſhall recommend it to the approbation of the wiſe and good; we ſhall protect it from the aſſaults of the perverſe and profligate; and ſhall gradually become the inſtruments of giving complete effect to the benevolent deſigns of that Being, who, in his own good time, will aſſuredly bring all the various nations of the world into one fold, under one ſhepherd, Jeſus Chriſt the righteous.

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SERMON X.

MARK XVI. 15.

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

WHEN our Saviour, after the completion of his earthly ministry, was preparing to ascend into heaven, this was his great and last command to the apostles: *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* Whilst he pointed out the end, he also prepared the means: he sent his Spirit from above, to fortify his apostles against danger, to console them under affliction, to dispel their scruples, and to correct their mistakes.

To theſe operations of the Holy Ghoſt on the minds of Chriſt's diſciples was added the power of working miracles; ſo that extraordinary and ordinary cauſes at once conſpired in ſupporting the efforts of thoſe who were friends to the goſpel, and in vanquiſhing the oppoſition of its fierceſt and moſt formidable enemies.

But the work of ſalvation ſo auſpiciouſly begun by the apoſtles, was not continued with the ſame ſpirit of charity and truth by the ſucceeding miniſters of Chriſt. More labour was exerted to allure thoſe who were already followers of his religion with ſome diſtinction of ſect or peculiarity of doctrine, than to reform the lives of the unconverted by its pure and ſimple precepts; or to convince their underſtandings by the diſplay of the genuine and characteriſtic doctrines which he had taught.

Chriſtianity, whether we conſider the promiſes of its founder, or the ſpirit of its

laws, is calculated for univerſal uſe, and claims univerſal belief. Its influence, however, muſt from the very conſtitution of the moral world neceſſarily be progreſſive; and in different circumſtances the knowledge of it will be in different degrees accelerated or retarded. The rude and uncivilized inhabitants of northern Europe more readily admitted the doctrines of the goſpel than the poliſhed and faſtidious citizens of Athens and Rome.

To the impediments which operated in particular countries, may be added other cauſes, ariſing from the general ſtate of the world. The want of a large and liberal intercourſe among the inhabitants of the earth, prevented for a time the diffuſion of Chriſtian knowledge. When nations became known to each other, the objects to which their attention was generally turned, had but little connection with the concerns of religion. Some were intent upon amaſſing wealth, and ſome upon graſping dominion. The tra-

veller was content with gratifying a vacant curioſity; and the philoſopher was chiefly employed in exploring the works of nature, without transferring his obſervations to any ſubject of utility; or in remarking the diſſimilarities of opinion and manners that exiſt among mankind, without the opportunity, or even the wiſh to reform them.

In ſuch times and under ſuch circumſtances it would have been vain to expect any plans for religious improvement, or any rational efforts for the diſſemination of religious knowledge. Yet we have reaſon, perhaps, upon the whole to congratulate ourſelves, that the propagation of the goſpel has rarely been the profeſſed aim of any nation in the ages which are paſt. The wild and romantic object of the cruſades, and the outrageous exceſſes committed during their continuance, are a proof that the Chriſtian religion, even from its own inherent qualities, is incapable of being propagated by the ſword:

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and from the characters of the cruſaders we may conclude, that the ſpirit which begins in a miſtaken and religious zeal, paſſes by eaſy and imperceptible tranſition into political cunning, or inſatiable ambition. Here then we find ſome of the cauſes, in conſequence of which the light has not hitherto ſhone with effect among thoſe nations which ſtill remain overſhadowed by ignorance, or hardened in unbelief.

In ſucceeding times the labours of Chriſtian countries have been vigorouſly and ſucceſsfully employed rather in the improvement of religion, than in the propagation of it. Its evidences have been collected; its doctrines have been elucidated; the attacks of its enemies have been repelled; and the morals of its profeſſors, upon the whole, have been purified. The powers and views of the human underſtanding are limited: and probably to the compreſſion of that ſtrength which has been exerted upon the

proofs and illuſtrations of Chriſtianity, where it is believed, may be aſcribed the juſt and enlarged notions which now prevail in the nations of Europe. If more had been attempted, leſs probably would have been performed: if our zeal had been chiefly directed to the diffuſion of the Goſpel, our ideas of its uſe might have been leſs correct and leſs comprehenſive.

From the inattention of the Europeans to the propagation of the goſpel in theſe later ages of civilization, and from the contracted views or the odious barbarities of thoſe who profeſſed to propagate it in leſs enlightened times, the inhabitants of many countries as yet continue rooted in the ancient abſurdities of Pagan ſuperſtition, or deluded by the arrogant and impious pretenſions of that falſe prophet, who preſumed to go forth, like another Meſſiah, in the Eaſt, and erected a larger kingdom on earth than the Son of the living God.

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But to thoſe, perhaps, who have a more juſt and extenſive view of the ſubject, this very delay will ultimately be found accompanied with advantages, which, while they redound to the honour of the moral government of God, ought to give new animation to our own endeavours. Would, for inſtance, Chriſtianity have been eſtabliſhed in its original purity, or to any good practical purpoſe by the rapacious conqueror, by the roving adventurer, or by the viſionary philoſopher? Where ſhould we have ſeen any traces of Chriſtian charity, or of rational piety, in that ſyſtem of opinions and that plan of ceremonial worſhip, which the frantic and ſanguinary zeal of the cruſader would probably have eſtabliſhed? Would not the gloom of papal ſuperſtition, and the ſeverities of papal domination, have been ſpread and exerciſed more widely? Might not the ſpirit of ſuperſtition have gained an acceſſion of ſtrength with the change of its object, if the goſpel had been firſt introduced by thoſe who could not ſo far underſtand it, as to

diſtinguiſh between its genuine and pretended doctrines? We therefore, who live in theſe enlightened times, have peculiar opportunities of doing what has been left undone by our forefathers; and for planing with wiſdom, and executing with ſucceſs, what they have either neglected, or attempted to do in vain. We have no miſconceptions of Chriſtianity to ſet right, no corruptions of it to purify. As Proteſtants, we have only to bear the Bible in our hands; to expatiate upon its importance and its truth; to teach what it reveals with ſincerity; and to enforce what it commands with earneſtneſs.

Chriſtianity was at firſt eſtabliſhed by extraordinary means; but though we preſume not to look for the renovation of miracles, or to deſire the inſtantaneous gift and utterance of divers tongues, we are ſtill enabled to accompliſh the ſame conviction in the unbelieving nations, by an induſtrious acquiſition of their various languages, and an acquaintance with their local

local prejudices, their manners, and their laws. These are the great duties of our miſſion; and that the taſk has been zealouſly, and in ſome degree ſucceſsfully performed, cannot be denied, without ingratitude to the piety and ſufferings of many individuals, who may juſtly be accounted happy ornaments of our own Chriſtian country and truly Chriſtian church.

But it deſerves particularly to be remarked, that while our endeavours have been directed to the inſtruction of ignorant and ſavage tribes, the taſk of converting the more enlightened nations, who are led away by the falſe pretenſions of the Arabian impoſtor, has been conſtantly declined as impracticable, or even oppoſed as inexpedient and dangerous.

To eſtabliſh both the expediency and practicability of propagating it, is the purpoſe of this diſcourſe. I mean not, however, to enter into an elaborate diſcuſſion of the general queſtion relating to the

duty of baptiſing all nations. That this duty is incumbent on Chriſtians of every age; that the command delivered in the words of my text, with a more immediate reference to the Apoſtles, is equally binding upon ourſelves; that under a change of external circumſtances, we can effect by ordinary meaſures what they were inveſted with extraordinary powers to perform, are poſitions which it is unneceſſary for me to eſtabliſh. They have already been enforced with great ſtrength of argument, and great ſplendour of eloquence, by ſeveral eminent writers, whoſe learning and whoſe liberal piety have done equal honour to their country, and to that reſpectable ſociety to which they belong: ſufficient therefore it is for me to declare, that I admit the juſtice of their reaſoning, and cannot add much to its weight. But the age in which we live is, we know, diſtinguiſhed by metaphyſical refinement. The clearneſs of general deductions is, in the minds of many perſons, obſcured by the ingenuity with which particular objections

jections are employed to gratify a fondness for novelty, and to weaken the authority of preſcription. Detached and hypothetical arguments are ſuffered to deſtroy the collective force of proofs already methodized, and of facts already admitted. It becomes us, therefore, to diſcuſs the ſubject with ſome kind of accommodation to the tempers and prepoſſeſſions of thoſe whom we would convince: and with this view I ſhall in the following diſcourſe FIRST endeavour to refute two objections which have been alledged againſt the propriety of *any* attempt to propagate the goſpel; and SECONDLY I ſhall conſider at large the peculiar expediency of propagating it among Eaſtern nations.

It has been objected with ſome plauſibility, that the Deity delights in the variety of religions which have appeared upon the face of the earth. The propoſition is ſpecious, but not new: for whatever pretenſion philoſophers may put up to originality, the ſame thing has been ſaid by

by one of thoſe writers [a], whom it is the cuſtom of thoſe ſame philoſophers to ridicule for narrow conceptions and groveling ſuperſtition. But as the general propoſition carries in it ſomething ſpecious and impoſing, it is worth our while to analyſe it. And here we ſhall have reaſon to apprehend, that men have not argued upon ſolid grounds from themſelves to the Creator. Variety in man pleaſes from ſentiment; from a ſentiment ſui generis: and perhaps the phyſical ſource of it is to be found in the weakneſs of our underſtanding, which incapacitates us for the contemplation of good, beyond a certain aggregate; or from the fickleneſs of our paſſions, which roam from one object to another, without any ſettled principle of choice. But neither the ſentiment itſelf, nor the cauſes from which it probably proceeds, can, without impiety, be aſcribed to the Deity. Here

[a] "Forſitan et varietas hujuſmodi, ordinante Deo, "decorem quendam parit in univerſo mirabilem." *Marcellus Facinus*, in his Treatiſe on the Chriſtian Religion, chap. iv.

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then there is no room for analogy: but there is a point of view in which another kind of analogy does exiſt, ſufficient, it ſhould ſeem, to vindicate the ways of the Creator, and to point out the duty of moral agents.

In the power of man over the animal and vegetable world, in the arts of civilization, in the means of drawing out the peculiar advantages, or counteracting the peculiar diſadvantages of climate; in the various expedients by which exiſtence is preſerved and made happy: one nation and one age differs from another. Yet we are directed by our reaſon, and impelled by our better inſtincts, to reform abuſes and extend improvements both in the phyſical and moral world. We teach the ſavage the art of healing; we aſſiſt him in fencing off the inclemency of the weather; we ſhew him the advantages of government and laws. In all theſe exertions the moral principle is inſtantly accompanied with a ſtrong

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ſentiment of approbation. The government of God was, doubtleſs, wiſe and righteous before the communication of this knowledge: but in our apprehenſions, it inevitably and juſtly becomes more defenſible and illuſtrious, when the evils of life are leſſened, or its bleſſings multiplied. The ſocial principle ſeems implanted in us for this very purpoſe. The moral agency of man is the inſtrument by which the goodneſs of God acts upon man. And in this enlarged view it is that philanthropy puts forth its whole force, and excites the higheſt approbation. Now, the religious government of God ſeems perfectly correſpondent to the natural and moral government of the world. And whereſoever there is a capacity in mankind to comprehend religious truths more largely, and to practiſe religious duties more exactly, that moment there ariſes a clear and ſtrong obligation upon us to communicate thoſe truths, and to encourage thoſe duties among our fellow-creatures. We look

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with admiration and gratitude upon the extraordinary interpoſitions, and upon the ordinary bleſſings which are conveyed to us in the courſe of his providence, independently of our own counſels and our own exertions: but ſurely his benevolence is not leſs important, and his wiſdom is even more conſpicuous, in that conſtitution of the world which enables us, and in that frame of mind which impels us, to do good one to another. In doing this good, we are effectually carrying on the gracious deſigns of our Maker; we obtain a more diſtinct and comfortable view of his government; and while we fill up the meaſure of our own duty as individuals, we complete the aggregate of that felicity which the ſpecies itſelf is capable of attaining, and which therefore we juſtly conclude to be intended for thoſe to whom it is in our power to communicate it. By theſe means the ſphere of our rational and religious powers is enlarged; the operation of phyſical and moral cauſes conſpires to the ſame end;

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the general ſtock both of virtue and of happineſs connected with it, is augmented; and in the ſucceſsful endeavours of thoſe who diffuſe the knowledge of the truth, and of thoſe who embrace it, we ſee the higheſt conſiſtence and perfection in that ſcheme of the divine government, where the intereſts of futurity are blended with thoſe of the preſent life; and where the immediate reward of each man's merit is inſeparably united with the increaſing welfare of all.

I now proceed to detect the fallacy of another ſophiſm, which owes its popularity rather to the confidence with which it is maintained, than to the ability with which it is ſupported. It is of little importance, we are told, what religion men profeſs, whether they admit one God, or more than one; whether they bow the knee at the altar of an imaginary or a real Deity, while they practiſe good morality. If then religion be a matter really indifferent and unimportant, let us entreat

thoſe who bring the objection to be conſiſtent with themſelves, and to ſuppreſs all the complaints which they have ſo often alledged againſt the ſuperſtitious bigot, and to check the raillery in which they have indulged themſelves againſt the deluded fanatic. On the contrary, if religion have an immediate and extenſive influence upon the peace of mankind; if by regulating opinion, it even remotely affect practice, let us not haſtily aſſume that it is always productive of evil conſequences; and let us diligently endeavour to examine the circumſtances in which it may be accompanied by ſuch as are proper and efficacious. Some of its doctrines are unqueſtionably congenial to the natural ſentiments, which, however diverſified by local or temporary cauſes, have prevailed in all ages and in all countries; to thoſe ſentiments which have their hold upon the wild barbarian, and the poliſhed citizen; to thoſe ſentiments, which agitate even the ſavage with wild admiration, and impreſs the philoſopher with ſerious awe. It would be

irrational to ſuppoſe that theſe ſentiments have nothing found in their principles; it would be falſe to aſſert that they are barren of effect; it would be daſtardly to imagine that the truths belonging to them will for ever elude enquiry; and it would be unjuſt to preſume, that when known, they will not confer ſome advantage. But the queſtion itſelf is, I am inclined to think, uſually ſtated in a manner that is both incorrect and invidious. As Tully was led by his enlarged and exact habits of thinking to lament the ſeparation between philoſophy and eloquence, ſo will every impartial and diligent enquirer find reaſon to be diſſatisfied that religion ſhould even in idea, be divided from morality. The fact is, that under proper directions, they act upon each other with an intenſe and inceſſant force; that they correct the miſconceptions, ſupply the defects, and invigorate the proper energy of each other. Both are made for man, and for both man himſelf is made; if we may argue from the ſtate where he is now placed, and from

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the faculties with which he is now endowed. There are many ſituations in which, impelled as he is by various deſires, and aſſailed by various temptations, he finds ſometimes ſalutary reſtraint, and ſometimes uſeful direction, in what are called their diſtinct and appropriate powers. There are many occaſions, on which he ſtands in need of their united aid, either when preſent conſiderations are too feeble to determine him in the choice of his ultimate intereſts; or when the proſpect of futurity is for a moment too clouded and too remote, to keep him ſteady in the path which can alone preſerve his innocence. Theſe obſervations are ſtrictly true, and deſerve our moſt recollected attention, even when we are reaſoning upon the ſuppoſition that Morality and Religion can with propriety be conſidered as diſtinct in mere ſpeculation. But the terms are ſurely, upon every principle of profound and impartial examination, contracted, and diſtorted from their right

meaning. Morality, in its full and juſt ſignification, includes all the duties of which a moral agent is capable, and all the foundations of thoſe duties which can be diſcovered by a rational being. Such it appears not only in the maxims of the wiſeſt ſages, but in the laws of the beſt regulated ſtates, where, as in the inſtitutions of a Solon or a Numa, religious as well as civil regulations have been permitted to hold a diſtinguiſhed rank. Such it was in the Moſaic code; ſuch it is in thoſe rules by which the Chineſe, the Hindoos, and the Mahometans are inſtructed in the worſhip of their Creator, as well as in their conduct to their fellow-creatures; ſuch it ſeems to be in the opinions and cuſtoms which have been eſtabliſhed in the darkeſt and moſt uncivilized nations; and ſuch it continued, as they gradually emerged from ignorance and from barbariſm.

Religion, therefore, if we appeal to the common apprehenſions of mankind, forms

forms a *part* of morality: and ſurely it is not the leſs valuable, or the leſs probable, becauſe it contains directions and ſanctions that relate to the whole.

Now, if the objector maintains that many religions which have gained credit in the world are falſe, we conſider the queſtion as then ſhifted from the point of Importance to the point of Truth. We deny any inferences from the fact alledged, which inſinuate that none therefore can be true: we maintain, that if any one religion be true, it cannot be wholly unimportant; and in eſtimating that importance, we have a right to inſiſt that the compariſon be made, not only between the hypothetical conſequences of any religion or none, but between the actual conſequences of that, which we allow with the objector to be falſe, and that, which in oppoſition to him, we are prepared to defend as the true.

As ſcholars, we admire the compoſition, and under many uſeful reſtrictions, we may, as philoſophers, admit the doctrine of the Univerſal Prayer, in which a writer of our own nation has united the moſt beautiful poetry with the moſt ſublime devotion. He there means to affirm that Jews, and Heathens, and Chriſtians, equally acknowledged the exiſtence of a ſupreme and intelligent cauſe, however they might diſtinguiſh him by different names, adore him in different forms, and even aſcribe to him different attributes. But from this fact, which we readily admit, he does not draw the hazardous and unfair concluſion, which alone I am concerned to refute. He does not ſay, that the notions entertained of the Deity, were equally juſt; that the worſhip they paid him was equally acceptable; and that either in a ſpeculative or a practical, in a philoſophical or a religious light, it was totally *indifferent* whether our faith was directed to the Olympian Jove, or to the inviſible Lord of Heaven and Earth,

In every country, it is true, God has given ſome witneſs of himſelf; has implanted ſome notions of his being and perfections; has received ſome inſtances of adoration and obedience, from thoſe whom he has made. In every country alſo he has given proofs of his creative power and providential care; has beſtowed ſome advantages which deſerve the gratitude of mankind; and expoſed them to ſome evils, for protection from which they muſt have recourſe to his gracious aſſiſtance, conveyed to them (as indeed moſt of his bleſſings are) by intermediate cauſes, by human activity, and human prudence. But in his religious as well as in his temporal diſpenſations, there is a great and an inconteſtable inequality: and to correct that inequality is often within our power; and when in our power, it aſſuredly becomes our indiſpenſable duty. We relieve, as was before obſerved, the diſtreſſed; we are conſcious in relieving them, of employing the means which God has given us, to the

ends for which he deſigned them: and in the hour of ſolemn and deep meditation, we are led to admire that conſtitution of the univerſe, by which man is qualified and impelled to promote the happineſs of man; and by which alſo phyſical evil becomes ſubſervient to the production of moral good. What then, I would aſk, are the reaſons which prevent our application of the ſame principles in the inſtruction of the ignorant and the miſtaken? We communicate the improvements of law, and the diſcoveries of ſcience: why then are we to be indifferent about imparting juſter notions of religion? Is truth leſs congenial to the mind upon theſe ſubjects than error? Is it ſo difficult to be communicated, as always to baffle our endeavours, or ſo inſignificant when communicated, as in no degree to reward them? The capacity of mankind to receive and to profit by religious inſtruction is, I confeſs, different in different circumſtances. Great candour, doubtleſs, and great caution are neceſſary in conducting the

the work. The progreſs of it will be retarded by ſluggiſh apprehenſion, by languid attention, or by perverſe oppoſition. The effects of it may, for a time, be counteracted by preconceived opinions, by inveterate habits, by the paſſions and propenſities of individuals; or by peculiarities in the manners, and it may be, the climates of a whole people. But theſe cauſes operate ſurely in all our attempts to enlighten men by knowledge, and to meliorate them by laws: and if the experiment be made ſucceſsfully in the one caſe, why ſhould we deſpair of ſucceſs in the other?

Every change that we attempt in the laws and the employments of a people, muſt be made, if it be made wiſely, with ſome reference to their religious tenets and modes of worſhip. The degree and the order in which we endeavour to improve them reſpectively, will depend upon a variety of cauſes which it will require our utmoſt ſagacity to aſcertain, and

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our utmoſt caution to manage. But all are capable of improvement: and that ſcheme has the faireſt chance for ſpeedy and complete execution, is moſt noble in itſelf, and will be moſt beneficial in its effects, which by a well-proportioned attention to the parts, beſtows harmony and ſtability upon the whole.

We have ſeen in a former Diſcourſe, that European nations are indebted for their ſuperiority to their religious creed as well as to their civil inſtitutions, or their philoſophical attainments; that each of theſe moral cauſes has a wide and viſible influence; that there is a ſphere for their united as well as for their diſtinct agency; that they aſſiſt in the improvement of each other; that they have their principles in the common nature of man; and that in their well directed and well exerted energies they conſpire to one common end, in enlarging our intellectual powers, in meliorating our ſocial affections, and in promoting our true and pro-

per happineſs, as Citizens, as Chriſtians, and as Men.

I aſſume therefore confidently the efficacy of religion; and I am warranted by experience in contending for the beneficial efficacy of the Chriſtian. In nations already baptized, we condemn the bigot and the fanatic upon principles both of revelation and reaſon; I mean upon their fundamental and conſiſtent principles; upon the expreſs precepts of the one, and upon the cleareſt dictates of the other. We know that the illiberal ſpirit of the bigot, and the abſurd notions of the fanatic, have a direct and unfriendly influence upon their moral conduct, and render them unfit for the preſent as well as the future world. Bigots and fanatics are to be found in thoſe nations whom we wiſh to baptize: the ſource of their imperfections lies in the wrong apprehenſions they entertain of the Deity himſelf, of the laws which he preſcribes, and of the means by which his favour is to

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be conciliated. If then Chriſtianity, honeſtly and rationally taught, be likely to correct their errors, to aſſuage their groundleſs fears, to ſoften their unſocial tempers, and eventually to open a wider field for their talents and their virtues, we are bound from a mere regard to its uſefulneſs, to open every avenue by which the knowlege of it may be conveyed to diſtant nations. If we are perſuaded of its truth, we may ſafely truſt the conſequences of its propagation to that omniſcient Being, who has implanted in us an inſtinctive love of what is true, and has prepared our minds for the reception of it from adequate inſtruments, and upon favourable opportunities. If we are impreſſed with a ſincere and grateful ſenſe of its divine original, we ſhall manifeſt that ſincerity and that gratitude, by our ardent wiſhes, and our unwearied endeavours to make other men partakers of thoſe bleſſings which we ourſelves enjoy. Truth, we allow, when metaphyſically analyſed, derives its moral importance from

ſrom its utility. But we contend, in our turn, that utility is, in an abſtract point of view, naturally connected with truth; and therefore with a reference to both, we inſiſt upon the expediency of propagating the Goſpel.

As to the obſtinacy with which nations adhere to thoſe religious tenets, which they have imbibed from education and contemplated with reverence, it furniſhes no ſolid argument againſt our project: it is indeed a juſt and weighty reaſon for an increaſe of caution, and on the very ſame ground of difficulty, it becomes an additional incentive to an increaſe of diligence. You diffuſe the light of philoſophical knowlege, though it muſt lay open the fallacy and abſurdity of many opinions, which tradition has preſerved concerning the origin and ſtructure of the world. You introduce ſuch laws and cuſtoms, as in a courſe of time will bring on a material revolution in the manners of the nations with whom you

are connected, and militate againſt many ritual obſervances, and, perhaps, ſome moral precepts, which are now protected by the ſuppoſed commands of the Almighty. Do you wiſh then, that they ſhould deliberately, and habitually diſobey the religion they believe to be true; or when you have gradually worn away the force of prejudice, and taught them by more comprehenſive and preciſe modes of reaſoning to reject it as falſe, do you mean to provide no ſubſtitute? When your ſocial habits and civil inſtitutions are eſtabliſhed on a firm foundation, and ſupported by general approbation and general concurrence, you may ſurely endeavour to avail yourſelves of the prepoſſeſſion which, in the minds of conſiderate and impartial men, they cannot fail to excite in favour of your religious code.

Doubts of a different kind from thoſe I have examined under a former head, have ariſen with ſenſible men, how far the propagation of the Goſpel in ſome countries,

countries, be upon the whole practicable or desirable: whether the doctrines of it would not be imperfectly understood, or grosly misconceived, or professed to no good purpose; whether as Gentilism and Judaism infected Christianity, so the favourite and inveterate superstitions of the American idolaters, would not soon debase its purity, and counteract its efficacy. But this objection does not reach with its full force to the Mahometans of the East, who are lifted far above the ignorance of barbarians and the ferocity of savages; and a wider scope surely would be here given for instructing them successfully in the sublimer doctrines of Christianity. The savage, whose gloomy and confined theology was perhaps the growth of turbulent passion and wild fancy, might easily be persuaded to admit the existence of miracles; from the similitude they bear to the supposed interpositions of his deities; from his incapacity to ascertain the force of natural causes; and from a kind of instinctive propensity to believe

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in thoſe which are extraordinary. But the Mahometans, while they admit the principle of miracles, might be made more diſtinctly to conceive, and more readily to embrace the argument from prophecy, in all its nice dependencies and gradual evolutions. Among them we are not to contend with the boiſterous tempers and ſtubborn habits which characteriſe the human ſpecies in a ſtate of barbariſm: we ſhould find them already a race of men and citizens, who by an eaſy tranſition might paſs to a full belief of the doctrines of Chriſtianity.

For the propagation of the Goſpel in the Eaſt many inducements and advantages are held out to us, which the ſavage condition of the Indians of America does not afford. The Mahometans are an immenſe body of men, natives of populous and mighty empires, greatly exceeding in population the kingdoms of Chriſtendom, and almoſt entirely occupying one quarter of the habitable globe. They are the ſubjects of regulated ſtates; they are

the obſervers of eſtabliſhed laws; civilized by the intercourſe of agriculture and commerce, and poliſhed by the uſe of letters and of arts. They are neither involved in the impiety of atheiſm, nor the darkneſs of idolatry; and their religion, falſe as it is, has many articles of belief in common with our own: which will facilitate our labours in diffuſing the true faith, and diſpoſe them to receive it. They believe in one God, creator and lord of all; to whom they attribute infinite power, juſtice, and mercy. They hold the immortality of the ſoul; and expect a future judgment, a heaven and a hell; they acknowledge an univerſal deluge; they honour the patriarch Abraham as the firſt author of their religion; they acknowledge Moſes and Chriſt to have been great prophets, and allow the Pentateuch and the Goſpel to be ſacred books.

Since, therefore, by our holy ſcriptures, the duty of attempting the univerſal converſion of mankind is amply

aſcertained; and ſince we find among the followers of Mahomet ſuch favourable prepoſſeſſions and eſtabliſhed doctrines, as will render eaſy the approach to their converſion, neither force of obligation, nor proſpect of ſucceſs is wanting, to encourage our progreſs and animate our zeal. By the miniſters of the Goſpel the examples of thoſe memorable times ſhould never be forgotten, when the rigid and cruel edicts of Decius and Dioclesian were ineffectual to ſubdue the ſacred enthuſiaſm of thoſe faithful diſciples of Chriſt, who, for the ſake of gaining one proſelyte to heaven, made a voluntary ſacrifice of every temporal enjoyment, and nobly forfeited their liberties and lives. Compared with what they ſuffered, and performed, how little is our labour, and how mild our obligation? To contend with the blindneſs and obſtinacy of an idolatrous and wicked age, and to groan under the oppreſſions of an overſpreading tyranny, was their ſevere, but glorious fate. It is ours to propagate the ſame religion

religion in countries to which our commerce has extended, when its truths have been confirmed by the revolution of succeeding centuries, and when its excellence has been illuſtrated by the wiſdom and experience of more enlightened times.

If any further inducement be wanting to excite our endeavours and animate our hopes in this work of charity, it is the conſideration that in remote and extenſive provinces, *ſubject to our own empire*, and obedient to our own laws, millions of the inhabitants *ſtill* wander in darkneſs and error; ſome deluded by the Mahometan impoſture, and others bigotted to the more ancient and more abſurd ſuperſtition of Brama.

The relation of a connected government, like that of a common country, is a tie that nature has made, and that never ſhould be violated, or forgotten. Actuated, I would hope, by this exalted principle, we have already extended to our

fellow-ſubjects in Indoſtan many of thoſe natural and civil rights, which we have ſo long regarded with an honeſt pride, and vindicated with a noble ardour.

It behoves us, therefore, as Men, as Engliſhmen, and as Chriſtians, to go farther. Let it not be ſaid, that even at this boaſted period of humanity and ſcience, when we are diffuſing the bleſſings of civil freedom over the remoteſt branches of the empire, no attempt is made to emancipate them from the chains of ſuperſtition.

Our ſettlements in India occupy a far greater extent than the Britiſh empire in Europe; yet in no part of theſe wide provinces has one ſingle effort been exerted to introduce the glorious light of the goſpel, and to diſpel the gloom which has for ages inveloped the wretched inhabitants. All the differences in religion which the native has ever known, are in reality but different modifications of error and impiety;

piety, and though he refuſe to ſubſcribe to one impoſture, he derives from that refuſal no other advantage than the unhappy alternative of paying an implicit and ſervile reverence to another.

The grand diſtinction, however, is that which ſeparates the Mahometans from the Gentoos. The latter were the original inhabitants; and their ſuperſtition was of high antiquity and diſtinguiſhed reputation in the country. The religion of Mahomet found its way into the diſtant regions of India by means ſimilar to thoſe by which it had been diffuſed over the intervening kingdoms. Within a century after the death of the impoſtor, the enterpriſing caliphs, amidſt the rage of conqueſt by which they were animated, carried their arms into this country: and though unable to ſubject any conſiderable part to their empire and religion, yet they continued to harraſs it with repeated incurſions through the ſucceeding ages. At length, however, in

the fourteenth century of the Chriſtian æra, directed by the ſame ſpirit of enthuſiaſm, the bolder genius of Tamerlane prompted him to engage in the conqueſt of theſe vaſt and populous regions, for the ſole and avowed purpoſe of reſcuing the inhabitants from the abſurdities of Paganiſm, and diſſeminating among them the ſaving truths of the holy religion of Iſlam!

In the proſecution of this romantic and viſionary project he deluged the plains of Indoſtan with the blood of thouſands of idolaters, and continued his impetuous career till at length oppoſition ceaſed before him, and the ſanguinary doctrines of his pretended prophet were finally eſtabliſhed on the ruins of the milder ſuperſtition of Brama.

Since the age of Tamerlane, Mahometaniſm has been uniformly the religion of the government of India: the Gentoos, however, are ſtill ſaid to exceed in number

numbers the Mahometans in the proportion of ten to one *, and to retain at this day an originality of character, which neither the ſudden violence of conqueſt, nor the ſlow operations of time have in any conſiderable degree effaced.

The religious creed of the Gentoos is a ſyſtem of the moſt barbarous idolatry. They acknowledge, indeed, one ſupreme God: yet innumerable are the ſubordinate deities whom they worſhip; and innumerable alſo are the vices and follies which they aſcribe to them. With a blindneſs which has ever been found inſeparable from Polytheiſm, they adore as the attributes of their gods the weakneſſes and paſſions which deform and diſgrace human nature; and their worſhip is in many reſpects not unworthy of the deities who are the objects of it. The favour of beings which have no exiſtence but in the imagination of the ſuperſtitious enthuſiaſt, is conciliated by ſenſeleſs ce-

* See Orme's Hiſtory of Indoſtan.

remonies and unreaſonable mortifications; by ceremonies which conſume the time which ſhould be dedicated to the active and ſocial duties; and by mortifications which ſtrike at the root of every lawful and innocent enjoyment. What indeed ſhall we think of a religion, which ſuppoſes the expiation of ſins to conſiſt in penances, than which fancy cannot ſuggeſt any thing more rigorous and abſurd; in ſitting or ſtanding whole years in one unvaried poſture; in carrying the heavieſt loads, or dragging the moſt weighty chains; in expoſing the naked body to the ſcorching ſun; and in hanging with the head downward before the fierceſt and moſt intolerable fire?

But it were endleſs to dwell on all their ſuperſtitious rites. The following, which has been frequently confirmed to us without prejudice and without deſign, is alone ſufficient to awaken every tender feeling of our hearts, and to incite us to the exertion of every effort which may tend to wean the minds of this unenlightened people

people from practices ſo impious and inhuman. It will eaſily be imagined, that I allude to that moſt cruel cuſtom, by which the wife of the Gentoo is induced to burn herſelf on the pile which conſumes the aſhes of her huſband; a cuſtom, if not abſolutely enjoined by her religion, yet at leaſt ſo far recommended by it, as to render the breach of it, in ſome caſes, ſubject to the utmoſt ignominy and deteſtation.

The facts which I have recited, as well as many others of equal importance, are too well known to be denied. From theſe alone every humane heart will at once infer the neceſſity of endeavouring to ſubſtitute the pure and rational religion of Jeſus in the place of a creed ſo ſhocking to our reaſon, and to our finer ſenſibilities.

Happily, however, there are circumſtances which ſeem favourable to ſuch an attempt. For, that natural ſagacity which

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is the national characteriſtic of the Gentoos, the auſtere and abſtemious life which they lead, the gentleneſs and ſerenity of their temper, their belief of a future ſtate, and the idea of one ſupreme God, which mixes even with the worſhip of their ſubordinate deities; all ſeem to afford a rational ground for us to expect their converſion.

But in what manner muſt we proceed in this intereſting and moſt arduous project? Have not ſchemes of religious reformation been planned with plauſible appearances in all ages; and in all have they not been foiled by real and ſtubborn difficulties? Are not the moſt approved reaſonings, and the moſt glowing eloquence, defeated by ignorance or obſtinacy in thoſe who are to be taught? Has not the indiſcretion or raſhneſs of the teacher, in too many inſtances, entirely counteracted his benevolence, however ſincere, and his activity, however unwearied? Let us not be diſcouraged by theſe general com-

plainly from taking a large and exact view of the particular queſtion we are now called upon to examine.

The awful ſubjects of religion are to be treated differently in different circumſtances. Some there are, whoſe minds are enlightened by ſcience, enlarged by long and extenſive intercourſe with the world, and invigorated by habits of profound and intenſe meditation: the faith of ſuch men will be unſhaken, and their devotion will be ardent, not from the aid of external forms, but by ſilent and ſecret adoration of the Deity, and by deep reflection upon the moſt extenſive and abſtracted truths of religion, both natural and revealed. But it would be viſionary and dangerous to expect the ſame beneficial effects among perſons of talents leſs cultivated, and of views leſs extenſive. Experience tells us, that with the bulk of mankind ſome caution is neceſſary in the ſelection of topics adapted to their apprehenſion, and that much ſagacity muſt be employed

employed in the uſe of all thoſe collateral and external expedients which are to awaken their attention, and to direct it when awakened, to proper objects. When therefore Chriſtianity is attempted to be propagated among the inhabitants of the Eaſt, the attention of thoſe to whom we preach it, muſt be confined to doctrines ſyſtematically inculcated, and to a ritual punctually obſerved. We muſt not leave the great truths of ſalvation fluctuating with wild uncertainty in the minds of thoſe who embrace them. To underſtandings which have recently emerged from the groſſeſt ſuperſtition, we muſt not commit the taſk of *appointing for themſelves* the modes of conciliating the divine favour by humble ſupplication and fervent thankſgiving. There is ſomething attractive, we know, in the regularity and decency of preſcribed forms; there is ſomething highly inſtructive and perſuaſive in the plainneſs and preciſion of doctrines methodically propoſed to the underſtanding. But in the *manner* of preparing

parting theſe doctrines and theſe forms lies the chief difficulty we have to contend with: and it muſt be confeſſed, that Chriſtian churches have often brought diſgrace upon the general cauſe of Chriſtianity, by an extravagant and undiſtinguiſhing attachment to their own peculiar tenets, and favourite ceremonies. They have ſuppoſed the followers of other ſyſtems equally able to comprehend what habit has familiarized, and equally diſpoſed to adopt what conviction has endeared to themſelves.

The efforts of miſſionaries, whom the policy or the zeal of the Romiſh church may have hitherto employed, have ſometimes incurred the contempt of the Infidel, and ſometimes provoked the indignation of the Philoſopher. They have been marked rather by eagerneſs to multiply converts, than by ability to promote the real happineſs of thoſe that were converted. They appear to have ſubſtituted one ſpecies of ſuperſtition for another;

other; to have darkened the underſtanding with error; and to have poiſoned the heart with bigotry.

But the advocates of ſound and rational Chriſtianity will not be expoſed to theſe formidable imputations. Whatever ſpecious and refined ſpeculations may ſuggeſt, upon the natural pliancy of the human mind in receiving, and on its natural firmneſs in retaining religious impreſſions, experience is our ſafeſt guide in dealing with the maſs of mankind, who are prone to run into the moſt oppoſite extremes; to be ſometimes fickle, and ſometimes obſtinate; ſluggiſh in one moment, and, in the next, precipitate. Our regulations muſt therefore, be adapted to the real *weakneſſes* as well as capacities of thoſe whom we would inſtruct. Some ſpecific doctrines, as I before obſerved, muſt be taught, and ſome particular ceremonies muſt be recommended: we muſt intereſt the imagination, whilſt we convince the judgement. But the

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tak arduous as it is, may be properly and effectually performed by a ſtrict adherence to the genuine and characteriſtic principles of Proteſtantiſm. The leading, the eſſential, the moſt indubitable, and the moſt important doctrines of Chriſtianity, muſt be propoſed to the eaſtern nations expreſſed in the cleareſt language, and ſupported by the moſt luminous arguments. When the errors and prejudices of thoſe whom we inſtruct, are, in ſome meaſure, ſubdued; and when their minds have been gradually prepared for a fuller delineation of evangelical truth, we may *then*, and then only, venture to propoſe thoſe doctrines which are of a more myſterious and recondite nature. We muſt diſcloſe them gradually, and with a ſpirit of the moſt enlarged toleration to thoſe perſons, whoſe ſcruples cannot be entirely vanquiſhed, and whoſe errors cannot be *at once* removed.

In overcoming the rooted and favourite prepoſſeſſions of the Gentoos and Mahometans,

metans, there, doubtleſs, will be room for the moſt accurate diſcrimination, and for the niceſt delicacy. Their ignorance muſt be treated with tenderneſs, and their well meant, though miſtaken piety, will demand ſome portion even of reverence. Every truth we communicate, muſt be aſſiſted and recommended by the method in which it is to be communicated. It muſt carry along with it the brighteſt and moſt unequivocal evidence, not only of the firm conviction it has impreſſed upon the judgment of the teacher, but of the amiable effects which it has wrought upon his temper, his actions, and his words.

I would have it underſtood, that no artifice, however, plauſible, no force, however indirect, ſhould be employed by proteſtant miſſionaries; and that my wiſh is rather to have Chriſtianity taught as a true revelation, than to ſee it eſtabliſhed ſuddenly upon the ruins of any falſe religion, which may have formerly prevailed. By theſe means we ſhall ob-

tain all the advantages, which the Romans enjoyed, by tolerating the cuſtomary worſhip and ancient theology of the nations whom they governed; and ſurely, from the ſuperior excellence of the doctrines which we endeavour to diſſeminate, and by which we profeſs to be ourſelves directed, we ſhall ſtand a fairer chance of making converts, than a heathen miſſionary; and ſhall derive greater benefits from thoſe who are converted, than paganiſm could confer on its ſincereſt and warmeſt votaries.

Similarity in religious perſuaſions certainly enlarges the ſphere of ſocial intercourſe; facilitates the progreſs of civilization; and invigorates the operations of lawful government. This ſimilarity it will be in our power to effect in ſome degree by judicious and temperate meaſures, in ſupporting the claims of Chriſtianity over the popular ſyſtems of belief that are now approved in the Eaſt. Let it, however, not be ſaid, that tenets ſo op-

poſite to each other cannot be taught with propriety, or even with ſafety, in the ſame country. Experience informs us that a Mahometan can obey the ſame laws, and purſue the ſame civil employments with the Gentoo: and doubtleſs, what is actually practiſed by the profeſſors of opinions ſo romantic and diſcordant, may be yet more practicable under the mild and auſpicious influence of the Goſpel. The energies of a firm and watchful government will repreſs the furious ſallies of zeal; will protect all parties indiſcriminately in their adherence to what they conceive to be truth; and at the ſame time will gradually prepare their minds for an impartial and ſerious diſcuſſion of ſuch evidence, as may be brought to ſupport the religion which really and ſolely *is the true*.

To the ſcheme here propoſed, there, doubtleſs, is an objection which a groveling and ſordid ſpirit of covetouſneſs is

too apt to cheriſh. "At preſent, it "may be ſaid, the credulous Maho-"metan, and ſuperſtitious Gentoo, are "unaſpiring in their views, and tract-"able in their diſpoſitions. Their opi-"nions do not diſturb our tranquillity, "and their ceremonies only provoke our "contempt. But if they ſhould here-"after ſee the fallacy of the one, and the "abſurdity of the other: if they ſhould "catch the manly and active ſpirit which "diſtinguiſhes the inhabitants of Chriſtian "countries: if the bolder exerciſe of their "intellectual faculties ſhould beget a juſter "ſenſe of their civil and political rights, "what may be the effects of ſuch a revo-"lution upon us? Actuated by nobler "feelings than they have hitherto experi-"enced, they will quickly exchange con-"fidence for diſtruſt, and ſubmiſſion for "reſiſtance. They will compel us, in our "turn, to drag the yoke of ſervitude; or "they will drive us from their ſhores as "a race of mercileſs ruffians, and in-"ſatiable plunderers."

Now on the broad and ſolid principles of philanthropy and revelation, I ſee nothing in this popular objection which ought to ſhake our conviction, or to ſlacken our activity. A religion which enlivens the induſtry, and animates the courage of thoſe who profeſs it; which awakens in them a more correct and more exquiſite ſenſe of their duties as men, and their importance as citizens; ſuch a religion, I ſay, carries with it many bright proofs of its utility and its truth. May we not then expect that the Philoſopher will view the ſcheme I am propoſing with fixed approbation, and that the Chriſtian will embrace it with ardent fondneſs?

However we may attempt to varniſh over the fact, the ſpirit of commerce will often ſeize, and often create opportunities of rapacity; and in regions very diſtant from the ſeat of empire, where the directions of law are frequently indiſtinct,

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and the reſtraints of ſhame are always feeble, the iron ſcourge of oppreſſion will ſometimes be lifted up againſt unprotected innocence, and conſpicuous merit; againſt ignorance which cannot aſcertain its privileges, and weakneſs which cannot aſſert them. But ſurely no plan of commerce can be laſting, and upon the whole advantageous; no form of government can be venerable or defenſible; which excludes mutual truſt, and does not provide for the mutual benefit of both parties, who are concerned with the one or ſubject to the other. On the contrary, if we communicate the arts, the laws, and the religion of Europe to Eaſtern nations; if we ſhew them by our works, as well as by our words, that we are the diſciples of Jeſus; if we labour both for their ſpiritual and their temporal welfare; there can be no reaſon to doubt of an ultimate and an adequate reward. They to whom we have given ſo ſure an earneſt of our ſincerity and of

our benevolence, will no longer view us with coldneſs as ſtrangers, or with ſuſpicion as foes. They will treat us, becauſe they are *themſelves treated*, as fellow-citizens and fellow-Chriſtians; they will ſhare with us in the common danger, and toil with us for the common intereſt; becauſe they will conſider themſelves as partakers of the ſame bleſſings here, and heirs of the ſame promiſes hereafter.

Such meaſures it is true, may prevent individuals from amaſſing exorbitant wealth, from revelling in luxurious voluptuouſneſs, and from graſping at enormous dominion. But ſuch meaſures, even if they tend to the removal of theſe outrageous evils *alone*, are not unworthy of our regard; and they deſerve a yet larger ſhare of our attention, if, in conſequence of our honeſt and ſtrenuous endeavours to execute them, the general harmony of the Europeans and Orientals would be more effectually ſecured, and the gene-

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r. happineſs of both promoted more ſucceſsfully.

Zealous in the recommendation of this purpoſe, I regard not the cold and miſtaken policy of ſome, who would ſeparate our religious from our civil intereſts. This country has ever boaſted with equal pride and juſtice the purity of its worſhip, and the excellence of its government. The ſame happy æra gave birth to each: out of the aſhes of deſpotiſm and ſuperſtition they both aroſe; and if they fall, they will fall together. Narrow therefore and falſe is that philanthropy, which pretends to be ſolicitous for the rights and liberties of mankind, while for their eternal welfare it employs no meaſures, and even profeſſedly feels no concern.

In what better purpoſe can a wiſe and virtuous nation be employed, than in propagating its religion,

wherefoever its laws are obeyed? If it ſeeks to protect, and not to impoveriſh; if it deſires to govern, and not to enſlave, it will be equally intent to diffuſe among its ſubjects the rights of freedom, and the privileges of Chriſtianity.

And at what period in the hiſtory of our empire could this attempt be made, with a more favourable proſpect of ſucceſs than at preſent? The extreme importance of Indian wealth to our commerce, and the growing connection between the principles of that commerce, and of the government which is to protect it, have awakened the attention of the legiſlature to ſubjects equally extenſive and intereſting. The code which directs the belief and influences the actions of the Hindoos, has been lately tranſlated into the vernacular language, and ſubmitted to the inſpection of public curioſity. Hence we are enabled to trace the long and cloſe connection that ſubſiſts

ſiſts between the religious and civil laws of the Hindoos. We can diſcern what errors are almoſt impregnable to argument, and what may be overcome by cautious and well-directed oppoſition. We ſee in their full magnitude the futility of their traditions, and the abſurdity of their ceremonies. We can mark the ſlow and imperfect progreſs of civilization and ſcience; and ſhould therefore be careful to make their future progreſs in religious knowledge keep a due proportion to thoſe improvements, in the attainment of which we are preparing to aſſiſt them in ſocial life. We cannot indeed ſo far adopt the policy of the Romans as to naturalize* any part of their mythology, becauſe *all* the parts of it are in *all reſpects* incompatible with our own religion. But we may gradually leſſen their reverence for their ſacred records, by exerciſing their faith on *other* more undoubted interpoſitions of the Deity. When European cuſtoms have

* See Halhed's Preface to the Code of Gentoo Laws.

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been in ſome degree introduced among the Hindoos, we ſhall find them leſs ſolicitous for the obſervance of Eaſtern ceremonies. When European ſcience has dawned upon their minds, we may ſee them leſs tenacious of their old opinions. The auſpicious effects of our laws will create ſome kind of prejudice in favour of our religion; and when they find it ſo perfectly exempt from the ſanguinary and intolerant ſpirit of Mahometaniſm, they may by degrees be brought to liſten to the evidences by which it is ſupported, and the ſanctions by which it is enforced. For incorporating their laws with our own, we have formed a plan, the completion of which is likely to do honour to our national policy and national magnanimity. Yet if we mean only to exempt the inhabitants of the Eaſt from temporary inconvenience and oppreſſion; if we do not intend to exalt them gradually in the ſcale of ſocial creatures; if we exert no endeavours for enlarging the ſphere of

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their future ſpeculation and *moral improvement*, we ſhall leave the work ſhamefully imperfect; and ſubſtitute, I fear, ſelfiſh cunning for genuine and enlarged wiſdom. It would, indeed, be a refined ſpecies of mockery to hold out the bleſſings of a free and equitable government, to thoſe who are too ignorant to underſtand, and too languid to enjoy them.

Such is the favourable poſture of affairs in the Eaſt, and ſuch the aſſiſtance which our political ſyſtems may there give to the propagation of religious truth. If we turn our eyes towards ourſelves, we ſhall perceive many ſtriking diſcriminations of the preſent age, which, under judicious direction, may not be diſadvantageous to the cauſe of Chriſtianity. A ſpirit of adventure is gone forth among us; a ſpirit of experiment: it has infected our philoſophy, our religion, and our politics. It has perplexed vulgar minds in the mazes

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of error and abſurdity, and hurried away men of the brighteſt faculties into the dangerous extremes of ſubtlety and refinement.

Let us apply this reſtleſs principle to a labour of more general importance, and more obvious utility: let us preſent a nobler ſcheme for its contemplation, and a worthier object for its exertions. No longer buſied in fruitleſs projects, and groundleſs theories, let us apply it, where it will be attended with practical advantage, in converting and enlightening our colonies in the Eaſt.

Gratitude, compaſſion, patriotiſm, and above all, the yet nobler principle of Chriſtian charity, call loudly on us to communicate to others the bleſſings which we ourſelves enjoy; to publiſh the glad tidings of ſalvation among thoſe nations that now ſit in darkneſs, aliens from Chriſt, and ſtrangers to the covenant of grace: and while we declare to the ſa-

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vage of America the joys and glories of everlaſting life, let us lead alſo the diſciple of Brama, and the follower of Mahomet, from the error of their ways, into the glorious light of the goſpel of peace.

To Omniſcience only are known the times and the ſeaſons. We cannot thwart the real purpoſes of Heaven by deliberate perverſeneſs or prepoſterous diligence. But the wiſh to forward them is always meritorious; the attempt, if conducted with prudence and with firmneſs, will procure us ſome reward; and ſurely, if in the moral government of the world, the Deity conveys temporal happineſs by the agency of his creatures, that agency becomes more ſplendid and more important, when it is wiſely and generouſly employed in promoting their eternal welfare. Though our powers and our efforts in carrying on the ſcheme I am now recommending to you into execution, ſhould be for a time ineffectual, the day will aſſuredly come,

when others ſhall accompliſh what we may attempt in vain; when all the religions of the earth ſhall be changed into the worſhip of the one true God; when not only the Mahometan and Hindoo, but every nation and every kindred ſhall bow the knee at the name of JESUS; and when Chriſtian charity, like its almighty Author, ſhall finally ſubdue all things unto itſelf.

NOTES.

P. 50. l. 13. *The fact we cannot diſpute, where we are utterly unable to aſſign the final cauſe.*] There is nothing more myſterious in this fact, than in many other occurrences and diſpenſations of divine providence: and it reflects no more diſhonour on the moral attributes of the Deity than other evils that infinite wiſdom daily permits to take place in the world. Ignorant minds are apt to be biaſſed by outward events, and often decide on the merits of a cauſe by the ſucceſs which attends it, abſtractedly from thoſe conſiderations which a wiſe man will always take into the account, in order to determine on the nature of that ſucceſs, its means, and its end. In the caſe of particular perſons this falſe mode of reaſoning is very common. We find it in the mouth of Bildad, when he would infer the diſpleaſure of God againſt the patriarch of Uz from

the calamities which had befallen him. *If thou wert pure and upright, ſurely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteouſneſs proſperous.* Cæcilius, in his celebrated diſpute with Octavius, could not conceive that the God, "the ſolitary God" of the Jews, as he denominates him, could be Almighty, and yet ſuffer his people to remain ſo long in captivity. This is the fallacious concluſion of men, who judge of the divine conduct by the partial rules of human judgment and experience; and think God to be ſuch a one as themſelves; governed by the ſame motives, and poſſeſſed of the ſame affections; limited in his views, and partial in his attachments. The providence of God reſpecting this people, had an object in view of a larger extent and conſequence than their particular fortunes: and the proſperity and adverſity of their church and ſtate were but means employed by infinite wiſdom to produce events of more univerſal importance.

P. 53. l. 7. *Baal*] Baal, the Syrian idol, for a time ſeems to have engroſſed the devotions and ſacrifices of the apoſtate Iſraelites, after Ahab had married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal the king of the Zidonians. [1 *Kings* xvi. 30.] The influence of this pernicious

pernicious example was ſo extenſive and apparent, that the prophet Elijah conſidered himſelf as ſingle in reſiſting it, and a ſolitary worſhipper of the true God. He was indeed miſtaken: but the degeneracy muſt have been almoſt univerſal, to have occaſioned the exclamation which he made: and thoſe whom God had preſerved from the idolatrous contagion of the times, certainly bore but a very ſmall proportion to the bulk of the people, who were infected with the moſt inveterate ſpecies of it. 1 Kings xix. 14, 18.

P. 54, l. 11. *Nor did the introduction of Chriſtianity into the world, &c.*] The influence of the goſpel is of a moral nature. It does not break in on the conſtitution of the human mind by any neceſſitating and irreſiſtible power. Men are left to judge of its nature and qualities by the common lights of the underſtanding; and it is in the power of the will to reſiſt its evidence. If the faculties were controuled by its force, there could be no merit in yielding to its influence. It would ceaſe to be a moral means of converſion, if it left no exerciſe for the judgment, and no choice for the will. As ſo much depends on a man's own conduct, in order to conſtitute him a moral agent, a ſubject of rewards and

puniſhments, we cannot conceive any ſcheme that would neceſſarily prevent the admiſſion, and, in ſome ſituations, the prevalence of error, without a total alteration in the plan of moral government. The faculties that may be employed to a good purpoſe, are liable to be perverted to a bad one. Divine wiſdom from time to time corrects and reſtrains the abuſes that ariſe from their miſmanagement: but to prevent them altogether, would require ſuch a perpetual intervention of a miraculous power, and ſuch a conſtant bias irreſiſtibly preponderating over the mind, as would deſtroy the very deſign of the goſpel, which is intended to produce a voluntary ſervice by moral motives; and not a neceſſary effect by a conſtraining and irreſiſtible impulſe.

P. 56. l. 15. *Thus he foretold; and the event juſtified the prediction.*] That the church was even in the earlieſt periods infeſted with hereſies of the moſt pernicious kind, cannot be denied. The apoſtles themſelves complain of ſectaries who attempted to ſeduce the ignorant and unwary by various artifices and impoſitions, ſuited to the various humours and prejudices of thoſe whom it was their aim to pervert. The primitive fathers found the ſubjects of complaint and remonſtrance ſtill

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more numerous and alarming: and they increaſed with the increaſing fortunes of the church. The heretics were ſo numerous, and the tenets they laboured to diſſeminate were ſo very prejudicial to the intereſts of the goſpel in the time of Juſtin Martyr, that he compoſed a ſet treatiſe in anſwer to them, which unfortunately has ſhared the fate of many other excellent treatiſes, the names of which have only eſcaped the wreck of time. [*Moſheim, vol.* ii. *p.* 152, 153.] The elaborate work of Irenæus experienced a better fate. It is a melancholy monument of the perverſeneſs of the human underſtanding, when it ſuffers itſelf to be deluded by novelties, and, inſtead of following the *form of ſound words* delivered in the holy ſcriptures, proudly purſues its own inventions with only fancy for its guide. But the early prevalence of error, ſo far from diminiſhing the credit of the goſpel, tends rather to eſtabliſh its authority; as it confirms the predictions of that divine oracle by whom it was delivered to the world.

P. 58. l. 9. *It appears then, as well from experience that error often does*, &c.] Errors muſt ariſe as long as men are free. Nor do they only ariſe from the moral conſtitution of free agents; but from the particular deſign-

ation of divine providence. God makes uſe of evil inſtruments to effect a good purpoſe. He puts ſuch reſtraints on wicked and erroneous men; ſo over-rules their conduct, ſo counteracts and checks their proceedings, that they may not infringe on the ſtanding laws of his kingdom, and derange the general plan of his providence. As *individuals* they are criminal; but conſidered in a more extenſive light, their conduct is ultimately beneficial. We find that errors were permitted under the Moſaic inſtitution for the ſame reaſon that the Apoſtle alledges for their permiſſion under the Chriſtian. Compare Deut. xiii. 1, &c. with 1 Cor. ii. 19.

P. 64. l. 2. *Among the biſhops*, &c.] The want even of a knowledge of the common rudiments of literature was ſo general among the higher eccleſiaſtics of thoſe times, that it was ſcarcely deemed diſgraceful to acknowledge it. In the acts of the councils of Epheſus and Chalcedon, many examples occur, where ſubſcriptions are to be found in this form: *I, ſuch a one, have ſubſcribed by the hand of ſuch a one, becauſe I cannot write.* And *ſuch a biſhop having ſaid that he could not write, I, whoſe name is underwritten, have ſubſcribed for him.*

P. 68.

P. 68. l. 10. *The very eſſence of Chriſtianity was loſt,* &c.] No repreſentation can convey ſtronger ideas of the melancholy ſtate of religion in the 7th century, than the deſcription of the character of a good Chriſtian as drawn at that period by St. Eligius, or Eloi, biſhop of Noyon.

" Bonus Chriſtanus eſt qui ad eccleſiam " frequenter venit, et oblationem, quæ in " altari Deo offeratur, exhibet; qui de fruc- " tibus ſuis non guſtat, niſi prius Deo ali- " quid offerat; qui quoties ſanctæ ſolenni- " tates adveniunt, ante dies plures caſtitatem " etiam cum propria uxore cuſtodit, ut ſecura " conſcientia Domini altare accedere poſſit; " qui poſtremo ſymbolum, vel orationem do- " minicam memoriter tenet. Redimite ani- " mas veſtras de pœna dum habetis in poteſ- " tate remedia; oblationes et decimas eccle- " ſiis afferte; luminaria ſanctis locis, juxta " quod habetis, exhibete; ad eccleſiam quo- " que frequentius convenite; ſanctorum pa- " trocinia humiliter expetite: quod ſi obſer- " vaveritis, ſecuri in die judicii ante tribunal " æterni judicis venientes, dicetis, Da, Do- " mine, quia dedimus." *Moſh. vol.* ii. *p.* 22.

P. 69. l. 15. *Even the fancied remains of that croſs.*] A veneration for the croſs very

early poſſeſſed the minds of the primitive Chriſtians; and was afterwards carried into all the extremes of abſurd and puerile ſuperſtition. Its allegorical reference was magnified into a real virtue: and what the apoſtles ſpoke of under the form of a metaphorical ſymbol became in time an object of devotion, and was made uſe of as an actual charm.

Ibid. l. 18. *The images of the ſaints who had laboured to diſſeminate.*] The earlier Chriſtians reprobated every ſpecies of image-worſhip in the ſtrongeſt language; and ſome of them employed the force of ridicule to great advantage in order to expoſe its abſurdity. When the Empreſs Conſtantia deſired Euſebius to ſend her the image of Jeſus Chriſt, he expoſtulated with her on the impropriety and abſurdity of her requiſition in the following very ſtriking words, "What kind of image "of Chriſt does your imperial Majeſty wiſh "to have conveyed to you? Is it the image "of his real and immutable nature; or is it "that which he aſſumed for our ſakes, when "he was veiled in the form of a ſervant? "With reſpect to the former, I preſume "you are not to learn, that *no man hath* "*known the Son, but the Father; neither hath* "*any man known the Father, but the Son; and*

"*he*

" *he to whomſoever the Son will reveal him.*
" But you aſk for the image of Chriſt when
" he appeared in human form, clothed in a
" body ſimilar to our own. Let me inform
" you, that that body is now blended with the
" glory of the Deity; and all that was mor-
" tal in it, is abſorbed in life."

P. 74. l. 19. *It of courſe admitted an almoſt endleſs variety of religious opinions.*] Vide Shareſtani apud Poc. Specim. Hiſt. Arabum, p. 136.

P. 75. l. 5. *Many of them eſcaped hither, as to a place of refuge from the dreadful calamities, which the juſt vengeance of God inflicted on their nation.*] Vide Millii Diſſert. de Mohammediſmo ante Mohammedem, p. 43.

Ibid. l. 11. *That ſect which was diſtinguiſhed by the title of Jacobites.*] The Jacobites took their denomination from one Jacob, a Syrian, who began to diſſeminate his doctrines in the Eaſt about the cloſe of the ſixth century. His ſect are ſometimes diſtinguiſhed by the name of Monophyſites, the progeny of the Eutychians, who aſſerted the *ſingle nature* of Chriſt in oppoſition to the orthodox, who maintained that his nature was twofold, human and divine. The Neſtorians, in avoiding this error, ran into the contrary extreme. In order

to

to ſupport his twofold nature, they alſo divided the *perſon* of Chriſt into two. The Athanaſians guard their creed againſt both theſe errors by maintaining that Chriſt is in *nature two*, but in *perſon one:* and illuſtrate the union by that of the ſoul and body in the human conſtitution. The plea of difficulty, and even incomprehenſibility, may be urged in one caſe as well as in another. The difficulty in the former is greater, becauſe the ſubject is of a higher degree. But if man is a myſtery to man, *can we by ſearching find out God?*

Ibid. l. 17. *Idolatry.*] For a full and particular account of the various objects which ſhared the devotions of the idolatrous Arabs, ſee Poc. Spec. p. 89, &c. Sale's Prelim. Diſc. edit. 4to. p. 17. Hottinger, Hiſt. Orient. p. 228, &c.

Ibid. l. 18. *The predominant ſpecies appears to have been that of the Sabians.*] See Poc. Spec. p. 138—143. Sale's Prelim. Diſc. p. 14. Thoſe who are deſirous of obtaining a more exact knowledge of the Sabian principles and worſhip, may conſult Hyde, Rel. vet. Perſ. p. 128. D'Herbelot, Bibl. p. 726. Hottinger, Hiſt. Oriental. lib. i. cap. viii. Prideaux's Connect. part i. book iii.

P. 76.

P. 76. l. 7. *The religion of the Magi had likewise found its way, and obtained an establishment among some of their tribes.*] See Poc. Spec. p. 146. Every important particular concerning this religion has been elaborately investigated, and clearly explained by the learned Hyde in his Rel. vet. Pers. and also by Prideaux, Connect. part i. book iv.

P. 77. l. 18. *With the Jew he maintained the inspiration of Moses.*] Sale's Koran, p. 407. edit. 4to.

Ibid. l. 21. *With the Christian he admitted the divine mission of Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel.*] Koran, p. 30. 35. 41. Reland. de Relig. Moham. lib. i. cap. iv. Elmacin, Hist. Sarac. p. 3.

Ibid. l. 24. *He even attempted to found his own pretensions on the preceding revelations of Moses and Christ.*] Koran, p. 174. 133, 449.

P. 78. l. 3. *That he was sent to purify a religion, which originally came down from heaven.*] Vide Millii Dissert. de Mohammedismo, &c. p. 5, 6.

Ibid. l. 18. *To close the seal of prophecy.*] Vide Hottinger, Hist. Oriental. p. 418.

P. 79. l. 5. *The art of writing had been known and practised by their countryman Job, and by the tribe of Hamyar, &c.*] The Hamyaritic

yaritic character was probably of very high antiquity. It was intricate and perplexed, making no regular diſtinction betwixt the different letters, from whence perhaps it had the name of *Al Moſnad*. Moramer Ebn Morra is ſaid to have been the inventor of the Arabic character, not many years before the birth of Mahomet. The letters invented by Moramer were, however, rude and imperfect, ſimilar to, or perhaps the ſame with thoſe which are called Cufic, and which are often found on ancient monuments in the Eaſt. The elegant and beautiful character now in uſe amongſt the Arabs, was formed from the invention of Moramer, by Ebn Moklah, almoſt 300 years after Mahomet, and finally brought to perfection by Ali Ebn Bowab in the following century. Vide Ebn Chalican apud Poc. Spec. p. 155—159.

Ibid. l. 9. *The reſt of the Arabs were totally unacquainted with this uſeful art.*] Ebn Chalican aſſerts, that at the firſt publication of the Koran, there could not be found in the whole country of Yemen one ſingle perſon who could read or write Arabic. Vide Poc. Spec. p. 156.

Ibid. l. 11. *Thoſe of Mecca in particular were peculiarly diſtinguiſhed as ignorant and illiterate,*

literate, even to a proverb.] The inhabitants of Mecca were called *the illiterate*, in oppoſition to thoſe of Medina, who from their acquaintance with the arts of reading and writing, not leſs than from their being in poſſeſſion of a written ſyſtem of religion, were diſtinguiſhed by the title of *the people of the book*.

Medina was principally inhabited by Jews and Chriſtians; and hence Mahomet in his Koran frequently applies this title to Jews and Chriſtians in general. See Koran, p. 71. 158, &c.

P. 80. l. 16. *Many of them abſolutely denied the poſſibility of a future ſtate of exiſtence.*] There were ſome amongſt the Arabs who denied both the creation of the world, and a future reſurrection; aſcribing the origin of the univerſe to what they call nature, and referring its final diſſolution to the effect of time. Others, though they admitted a creation, yet totally rejected every idea of a reſurrection of the dead. Vide Shareſtan. apud Poc. Spec. p. 134.

P. 81. l. 5. *Should again be called into exiſtence*, &c.] Vide Poc. Specim. ubi ſupra, Millii Diſſert. i. de Moham. p. 14.

Ibid. l. 22. *And believed that even the animals*, &c.] Pocock, on the authority of Al

Jauhari, Ebno'l Athir, Shareſtani, and other Arabic authors, relates a ſingular cuſtom which prevailed among ſome of the Arabians, of tying a camel over the grave of the deceaſed, where it was left to periſh without food; leſt its maſter ſhould ſuffer the diſgrace of walking on foot in another world.

P. 83. l. 3. *A felicity conſiſting only of pure and ſpiritual pleaſure, would have been too refined for the groſs and ſenſual conceptions of the uncivilized tribes of Arabia. Gardens fairer than that of Eden, watered by a thouſand ſtreams, and enlivened by the blooming beauties of paradiſe, ſeemed better calculated to excite their deſires, and to engage their attention.*] Mr. Bayle, with his well known rage for paradox, and with the diſplay of his uſual acuteneſs, controverts this poſition, and aſſerts[a], that the Chriſtian doctrine of a future ſtate is far more alluring to the unchaſte and ſenſual than the Mahometan.

But we reply, that the influence of favourite objects diſtinctly conceived as to their reality, their power of pleaſing, and their preciſe degree of augmentation, would in depraved minds certainly overpower the efficacy of thoſe indiſtinct ideas which Chriſtianity ex-

[a] Article *Mahomet*, Note M.

cites

cites concerning the joys of futurity. Even the growing and unlimited magnitude of the happineſs propoſed by the goſpel, would have leſs luſtre in the imagination, and leſs efficacy upon the will than corporeal pleaſures of which the deſire is ſharpened by partial anticipation.

The experience of every day proves, that the eſtimation we put upon objects is rarely proportioned to their intrinſic or to their comparative worth. All happineſs is indeed relative, not merely to the capacity of an intelligent being, but to his deſires: and thoſe deſires, it is well known, are influenced by cuſtom, by education, and by a variety of cauſes, which miſlead both our opinions and our choice. Even good itſelf implies a ſuitableneſs between objects and their appetites: and therefore in chuſing it, we are governed by thoſe deſires which are moſt ſtrong, as by thoſe objects which are likely to give them the fulleſt and moſt exquiſite gratification. Mr. Locke[b] has very ably pointed out the abſurdity of the ancient philoſophers in their diſputes concerning the *ſummum bonum*, as exiſting excluſively and ſolely in things internal or external, in wealth or ſenſuality, in virtue or

[b] On Human underſtanding, book ii. chap. xxi. ſect. 55.

contemplation. " For as pleaſant taſtes de-
" pend not on the things themſelves, but
" their agreeableneſs to this or that particular
" palate, wherein there is great variety; ſo
" the greateſt happineſs conſiſts in the having
" thoſe things which produce the greateſt
" pleaſure, and in the abſence of thoſe which
" cauſe any diſturbance, any pain: now theſe
" to different men are very different things."

Thus we may account for the diverſities of good among beings who are of different ſpecies, and thoſe who are of the ſame. The enjoyments of men have no attractions to a brute, becauſe he cannot attain them; and becauſe he does not comprehend them. The enjoyments of a virtuous man have ſcarcely any attractions among the vicious, becauſe they place their happineſs in gratifications of another kind; and therefore it is to little purpoſe that we inſiſt upon the ſuperior pleaſure of virtue, till the tendency of a bad man's deſires towards ſenſual gratification, and the prepoſſeſſions of his judgment in favour of them, are fully corrected. Otherwiſe, he conſiders the appeal as made from experience to probability: he hears the voice of religion addreſſing his weakeſt deſires, in oppoſition to his ſtrongeſt: and under theſe circumſtances,

ſtances, Mahometaniſm would, in many caſes, prevail over Chriſtianity. I am here ſtating, not what is moſt *proper* to be done, but what it is moſt *probable* that a wicked man would do. Reaſon, if its ſerious and impartial voice could be heard, would teach even the worſt of men to ſtrive for that happineſs which is moſt adapted to their capacities, as moral agents: but the paſſions of the ſenſualiſt prevent him from hearing that voice, and determine his will to prefer what is moſt agreeable to himſelf.

Even Mr. Bayle himſelf ſeems to argue on the principle for which I am contending, that pleaſure is relative as to the degree both in which it is perceived and deſired. "Make a "man feel more pleaſure, ſays he, in a geo-"metrical problem than in ſenſuality; and "he will renounce one for the other."

Now the pleaſures of the contemplative geometrician are doubtleſs ſuperior to thoſe of the licentious voluptuary. Yet as the latter has very confuſed and imperfect notions of the enjoyments poſſeſſed by the former, he cannot eaſily be made to feel them, and he muſt ſuffer his impartial reaſon to prevail over the ſuggeſtions of his memory, and the impulſes of his affections, before he can value them

properly, or desire them sincerely. Their real superiority, even if he could attain them, would be before he attained them doubtful; and the renunciation of what he has hitherto pursued, is a condition to which he probably would not accede, for the sake of something which he is desired by others to pursue. The pleasures of speculation, opposed to those of sense, are in the eye of calm and unprejudiced reason superior: but the reason of the sensualist is not unprejudiced, and therefore his choice is unwise.

It is necessary to guard some of the foregoing positions from the misconceptions of those, who, because desire is necessary to the existence of good, would make the strength of desire the measure of that good; and contend that all kinds of good, equally desired, are when attained really equal, to creatures respectively capable of enjoying them. But surely instinct, the proper good of a brute, stands below reason, the proper good of man. The enjoyments to which instinct leads, are interior to those which reason can attain. To a mind capable of enjoying them, moral and intellectual pleasures are superior to those which arise from the possession of wealth, or the gratification of sense. In the same manner

ner we juſtly reaſon, that the ſpiritual felicity promiſed by the goſpel, is far more ſuited to the capacity and to the dignity of a moral agent, and productive of nobler and more delightful ſenſations, than the carnal pleaſures which Mahomet holds out to his followers. The deſires of that which the mind apprehends, whether juſtly or unjuſtly, as good, may be equally ſtrong; the objects may be equally proportioned to thoſe deſires; and yet, from the *peculiar* properties of the objects themſelves, and from the greater phyſical capacity of enjoying them, one ſpecies of good will be ſuperior to another. But if this ſuperiority is not perceived, it cannot operate as a motive. Hence, when the love of virtue itſelf is not excited; when its tendency to produce a higher degree of good is unſteadily believed or coldly felt; when the affections which prevent us from believing it firmly, and feeling it ardently, are controuled; a religion which diſcountenances vices, will be leſs acceptable than a religion which tolerates them in its precepts, and even cheriſhes them by its ſanctions. Now, Chriſtianity endeavours to controul thoſe affections, by ſhewing that habitual and unreſtrained gratification will end in miſery. And here ſurely we have a ſtrong

argument in vindication of the puniſhment denounced by the goſpel; becauſe the proſpect of that puniſhment is neceſſary to the extinction of thoſe deſires which obſtruct us in forming a right eſtimate of the happineſs God has reſerved for us, and which check the impulſe of other and better deſires, directed to other and better objects.

We have before obſerved the inſtinctive and almoſt irreſiſtible propenſity of the mind to form its expectations and opinions of another ſtate from the objects which are in this world contemplated with the greateſt ſatisfaction, and purſued with the greateſt earneſtneſs. The warrior in many countries again expects to triumph over his foes. The champion exults in the idea of again ſnatching the prize from his competitor. The ſenſualiſt preſſes forward to the continuance and increaſe of corporeal enjoyments; eſpecially, when the authority of religion itſelf is ſuperadded to thoſe natural appetites which have gained the ſtrongeſt poſſeſſion of his ſoul. So juſt upon the principles of recondite philoſophy, and ſo correſpondent to the practice of men, and to the ſecret and ſtubborn habits of their minds, is the declaration of ſcripture, that *where a man's treaſure is, there will his heart be alſo.* We

cannot

cannot then be ſurpriſed, that the ſenſual man carries on his deſires from the preſent to the future, and prefers known gratifications to the *unknown*. He does not indeed make a wiſe and profitable choice: he does not act as right reaſon would induce him to do from an unprejudiced and comprehenſive conſideration of all his poſſible intereſts, in all their real circumſtances. But he acts according to that view of good which more immediately and more forcibly preſents itſelf to his diſtempered mind. Shall we be aſked then, whether Chriſtianity holds forth its purer rewards *in vain?* Does it encourage us to ſeek what cannot be attained, becauſe it cannot be deſired? Does it, with the moſt inſulting mockery, condemn the vicious man for refuſing what it is altogether, and at all times, out of his power to accept? No ſurely. He that made us, and knows our infirmities, has not dealt with us thus treacherouſly and cruelly. On the contrary, he has adapted the religion of Jeſus to the real conſtitution of our nature, to its real defects, and its real capacity of improvement. By its precepts the goſpel *firſt* endeavours to correct the irregularity of our appetites: and *then* by its promiſes operates moſt powerfully upon our deſires thus corrected. In propoſ-

ing, indeed, thoſe objects which awaken the attention and gratify the wiſhes of the libertine, it would have counteracted one great purpoſe for which the Saviour of Mankind appeared in the world; the purpoſe of making us better, in order that we may become happier. On the other hand, by refining the affections, and by providing ſuch enjoyments as are moſt ſuitable to them when they are moſt refined, it is calculated to exalt us to the greateſt happineſs, of which, as moral, and as rational beings, we are capable. But if men perſiſt in a deliberate and contemptuous diſregard of the precepts of Chriſtianity, they will feel no ſtrong or regular effects from its promiſes. If they continue in their indulgence of the groſſer appetites, they will liſten with reluctance and incredulity to the offer of a good, which bears no ſimilitude to the objects wherein they are accuſtomed to place their happineſs, and which peremptorily require the immediate renunciation of them. Doubtleſs, the felicity propoſed by the goſpel is ſuch as will be embraced by thoſe who cultivate virtue, and follow the duties of reaſon. The morality inculcated by it is ſuch, as will approve itſelf to reaſon, and encourage the love of virtue. Mahometaniſm, on the contrary,

trary, often meets with a favourable reception from corrupt men, in conſequence of their corruption; and by opening to them the proſpect of thoſe enjoyments which are moſt familiar and moſt dear to them, it eventually gives a ſanction to the moſt vicious deſires of the heart. Thus the very circumſtances which would induce a wiſe and good man to reject the Koran, as a revelation proceeding from God, become additional motives with perſons of prejudiced and depraved minds to adopt as true what they feel to be pleaſing. But the goſpel purſues a different and a more natural courſe. It appeals to the fears of the wicked, and to the hopes only of the virtuous. It terrifies, in order to correct; and it rewards only thoſe who are corrected. It makes the dread of puniſhment inſtrumental in producing that ſtate of mind in which alone the deſire of happineſs can exiſt with propriety, or with effect.

P. 83. l. 7. *Gardens fairer*, &c.] See Koran, p. 204. 410. 433.

P. 87. l. 13. *Looking forward with anxious expectation to the joys of paradiſe*, &c.] Vide Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moham. p. 43.

P. 88. l. 1. *The fellow-citizens of the impoſtor*, &c.] Vide Elmac. Hiſt. Saracen. p. 3. Abu'l Fed. p. 24, &c.

P. 88, l. 13. *The ſubmiſſion of the holy city.*] Mecca opened her gates to Mahomet in the 8th year of the Hejra. Vide Abu'l Feda, p. 102. 106. Elmacin. p. 8.

Ibid. l. 16. *The ſenſeleſs objects of Arabian devotion.*] Mahomet found no leſs than three hundred and ſixty idols round the Caaba, all of which he deſtroyed. Abu'l Fed. p. 107, 108. and Note ibid.

P. 89. l. 16. *No longer ſcrupled to aſſume the enſigns of temporal as well as ſpiritual dominion.*] Elmacin. p. 7. and Note in Abu'l Fed. p. 111.

Ibid. l. 21. *The troops of the imperial prophet.*] Vide Abu'l Fed. ubi ſupra.

P. 90. l. 4. *The ſtreets of Medina were crouded with ambaſſadors.*] From the number of theſe embaſſies, this year was called *the year of embaſſies.* Abu'l Fed. p. 128.

P. 91. l. 13. *Little remained to be done, but to purſue the path which he had traced.*] At this critical period the aſſaſſination of one, and the deciſive overthrow of another of the competitors of Mahomet, who had with equal ambition, though with inferior abilities, aſpired to the ſame pre-eminence, gave new ſtrength and authority to the infant government.

Al-Aſwad[c] in the ſpace of four months

[c] Abu'l Fed. p. 158.

had

had rendered himſelf extremely formidable, and ſubdued the greater part of Yemen, beſides other provinces, when he was aſſaſſinated by the contrivance of Mahomet, on the very day before the death of that impoſtor.

Moſailama[d], called by the Mahometans 'the lying Moſailama,' had once profeſſed the religion of Mahomet, but afterwards apoſtatizing, aſſumed the character of prophet himſelf, and collected a very numerous body of followers, when his party was totally routed by the Mahometan army under the command of Chaled Ebno'l Walid, and himſelf, with ten thouſand of his troops, put to the ſword. This ſignal victory was obtained in the firſt year of the reign of Abu Beer, the ſucceſſor of Mahomet.

Taliha[e], another competitor of Mahomet, having raiſed a conſiderable party, was routed and put to flight by the ſame commander; and afterwards returned to his allegiance in the reign of Omar, the ſecond Caliph.

Theſe facts are of ſingular importance, as they tend much to leſſen our wonder at the ſucceſs of Mahomet, among his own countrymen at leaſt, by proving how eaſily the Arabians admitted, and how zealouſly they de-

[d] Abu'l Fed. in Vita Abu-Becri.
[e] Elmacin, Hiſt Saracen. p. 16.

fended

fended the groundleſs claims of every daring impoſtor.

P. 102. l. 5. *By this authority every queſtion of life and of property is finally decided.*] During the firſt century of Mahometaniſm, the followers of the prophet, poſſeſſed of little fixed property, and engaged ſolely in the occupations of war, found in the words and letter of the Koran a law fully adequate to the purpoſe of regulating all their civil affairs. But when their numbers were conſiderably increaſed, when their dominion was eſtabliſhed over opulent and extenſive kingdoms, and when the arts of peace and the employments of commerce had ſucceeded to the tumult of war, the inſtitutions contained in the mere letter of their law was probably too vague and too general, to preſerve the order and well-being of civil ſociety. It was then that commentators aroſe, whoſe object it was to ſupply the defects, without derogating from the authority of the original law; or alienating any part of that implicit obedience, to which it was entitled. With this view numberleſs volumes have been compoſed; on the moſt reſpectable of which every deciſion in the Mahometan courts is founded. All of theſe, however, profeſſedly derive their ſole force, and claim to reſpect, from the venerable and infallible authority of the Koran.

P. 104.

P. 104. l. 11. *By the ablest commentators.*] See this prophecy particularly explained in Mede, Newton on the Prophecies, vol. iii. p. 98, &c. Bagot's Warb. Lectures, p. 290. and Halifax's Warb. Lect. p. 318.

P. 109. l. 16. *It is even necessary to acknowledge, that in the finger of God we find the only adequate, and therefore the real and illustrious cause.*] We are told by a very acute, but mischievous writer of Metaphysics[f], that from a finite effect we can only infer a finite cause. Now, if this subtlety be employed to disprove the divine original of the Gospel, we contend against the Deist, that it bears equally hard against the evidences of natural religion, and cannot therefore be consistently employed by him who admits those evidences: and to the Atheist we reply, that it does not, when fairly examined, answer the purpose for which he would employ it. The Being, from whom all things derive their existence, may be in his attributes infinite, though his works, in which subsist the relations of cause and effect, be finite. By this distinction we secure the honour of the divine nature: and carrying on the same distinction to the introduction and establishment of the gospel, we first shew, that it is not of human original, because all efforts

[f] Hume's Essays, vol. ii. p. 153. edit. 1764.

of

of human agency are unequal to the effect; and we then aſſert, that every rule of juſt reaſoning authorizes us to admit the divine agency which is equal. If indeed our enemies be perſuaded, that the unaided power of man could not have eſtabliſhed the goſpel, we ſhall find little difficulty in conquering the arguments which lead us to have recourſe to any intermediate cauſe, that falls ſhort of divine interpoſition.

P. 112. l. 15. *The promiſe of a Redeemer*, &c.] It is evident from ſeveral paſſages in the New Teſtament that the Jews were in expectation of the Meſſiah at the time of Chriſt's appearance. The woman of Samaria, though of a ſchiſmatical church, yet deriving her knowledge from the ſame ſource of divine prophecy, ſaid to Jeſus, *I know that the Meſſiah cometh*, &c. John iv. 25. In Luke iii. 15. we are informed, that the preaching of John was of ſo divine a nature, that *all men muſed in their hearts whether he was the Chriſt or not*. And when Jeſus had performed a variety of miracles, which evidently beſpoke a divine interpoſition, this actual queſtion was propoſed—*When Chriſt cometh, will he do more miracles than this man hath done?* John vii. 31. Whether therefore the Jews believed that Jeſus

was

was the Meſſiah, or rejected him under this character, it is evident that they were in expectation of a perſon who ſhould ſuſtain the office. And indeed the confirmation, which he gave to his claim to this ſuperior and diſtinguiſhing title, was ſo full and clear, that it is ſaid in the 40th and 41ſt verſes of the forecited chapter, *that many of the people declared of a truth, This is that Prophet, others ſaid, This is the Chriſt.* The meſſage of the Jews by the Prieſts and Levites to John, *Art thou the Chriſt?* is a ſufficient proof of the expectation which generally prevailed of the advent of a divine perſon, ſuſtaining this character. John i. 19. The *Coming of the Meſſiah*, made an expreſs article of the Jewiſh faith, as we are informed by Maimonides and others of that church: and the denial of it was deemed a dangerous hereſy, and a virtual renunciation of the authority and truth of the law of Moſes.

P. 135, &c. Here it would not be difficult to multiply authorities to ſupport what has been advanced in this and the following pages reſpecting the Gentile philoſophy; but as the ſubject is familiar to ſcholars, and has been often ably and fully diſcuſſed, I purpoſely forbear entering into particulars, and refer my readers in general to Brucker's *Hiſtoria Philoſophiæ*.

P. 170.

P. 170. l. 17. The warm imagination and enthuſiaſtic zeal of Arabian authors has not ſuffered the birth, the infancy, and the youth of their prophet to remain undiſtinguiſhed by many of thoſe preſages of his future greatneſs, with which ſuperſtition is ever ready to adorn the hiſtory of its heroes.

Even the learned and ſenſible Abu'l Feda has related at large ſeveral of the prodigies which are ſaid to have announced the birth of the infant prophet to the world, together with their explanation by Satih, a famous diviner of thoſe days. Abu'l Feda, p. 112.

Ibid. l. 18. *The circumſtances which attended the earlier years of Mahomet were certainly ſuch as preſented no flattering proſpects of grandeur, and no probable views of ambition to his future life,* &c.] Abdollah the father of Mahomet died, according to ſome authors, when he was two months old. Five Camels, and an Æthiopian female ſlave comprized the whole of his property, which remained for the ſupport of his widow and orphan ſon. See Abu'l Feda. Vit. Moham. p. 2. Abu'l Faraj. de Moribus Arab. p. 6.

P. 170. l. 21. *Though deſcended from the moſt honourable tribe of Arabia.*] The tribe of Koreiſh, in which Mahomet was born and educated

educated, was the moſt illuſtrious of all the tribes of Arabia. They were at that time peculiarly diſtinguiſhed by their zeal for the ancient ſuperſtition, and were entruſted with the immediate cuſtody of the temple of Mecca. In order to ingratiate himſelf with them, and to induce them the more readily to embrace his religion, Mahomet transferred many of their inſtitutions into his new ſyſtem. Abu'l Feda, p. 6. Note. Hott. Hiſt. Orient. p. 206.

P. 173. l. 6. *During his travels into the neighbouring nations.*] Abu'l Feda. Vit. Moham. p. 10, 11, 12.

Ibid. l. 23. *But when a ſudden and unexpected change of fortune had raiſed him from poverty and dependence to opulence.*] Mahomet, in the 25th year of his age, was raiſed to an equality with the richeſt citizens of Mecca by his marriage with an opulent widow whoſe mercantile affairs he had conducted in Syria highly to her ſatisfaction. This event may juſtly be conſidered as the foundation of all the future fortune of Mahomet: who, ſenſible of the advantages he had derived from the favour of Khadijah, is ſaid to have remained ſtrictly faithful to her during the whole of her life; and after her death to have ever ſpoken of her in terms of the warmeſt and moſt grate-

ful reſpect. Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moham. p. 12. Note ibid.

P. 174. l. 20. *In a lonely cave, in the receſſes of Mount Hara he ſhunned the ſociety of men.*] Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moh. p. 15. Note ibid.

P. 177. l. 15. *The belief of one only ſupreme God.*] The former part of that well known ſentence which now conſtitutes the Mahometan confeſſion of Faith, *there is no God but God*, is ſaid to have been in uſe amongſt the ancient Arabs long before the time of Mahomet, and was expreſſive of their belief in the unity of the ſupreme Being. Vide Mill. de Mohammediſmo ante Moham. p. 11.

P. 182. l. 3. *The character of Mahomet, according to eaſtern hiſtorians, had been hitherto preſerved unblemiſhed*, &c.] Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moham. p. 11.

P. 183. l. 4. *When the time which he had choſen to announce his miſſion approached.*] Mahomet was forty years old when he aſſumed the prophetic character; he probably delayed the commencement of his impoſture to ſo late a period, not merely with a view of more effectually maturing his ambitious projects, but alſo in compliance with an opinion which ſeems to have become proverbial amongſt the Arabs, that a prophet was never commiſſioned

by

by God, before he attained his fortieth year. Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moh. p. 14. and Note ibid. Koran, p. 167, 168.

Ibid. l. 7. *According to the expreſſion of Abu'l Feda.*] Vit. Moham. p. 15.

P. 184. l. 4. *After three years.*] Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moham. p. 18.

P. 186. l. 8. *Unſhaken in his purpoſe, and regardleſs of the dangers and difficulties that ſurrounded him.*] Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moh. p. 21.

P. 187. l. 13. *Compelled, however, to eſcape by a precipitate flight.*] From this flight of their prophet, the famous æra of the Mahometan derives its beginning and its name: the word *Hejra* in the Arabic language ſignifies *a flight.* Abu'l Fed. Vit. Moham. p. 23, and Note ibid.

P. 189. l. 3. *Reſemble the irregular exploits of a robber,* &c.] See Abu'l Fed. p. 55.

P. 190. l. 15. *Diſmiſſing thouſands of his captives.*] See Ibid. p. 118.

Ibid. l. 21. *Imbruing his hands in the blood of the conquered.*] Mahomet at one time beheaded near ſeven hundred Koraidhites, his priſoners, under the moſt aggravating circumſtances of cruelty. The command was not iſſued in the heat of action, when his paſſions were inflamed by the oppoſition which

had been made to his power; but after his return to Medina, after a conſiderable ſpace had elapſed, and given time for his reſentment to cool, and for the feelings of humanity to exert their influence in his breaſt. See Abu'l Feda, p. 79.

The Deity is afterwards introduced in the Koran giving the ſanction of his approbation to this diſgraceful act of ſavage barbarity.—"A part of them ye ſlew, and a part of them "ye made captives; and God hath cauſed "you to inherit their land, and their houſes, "and their wealth." Chap. xxxiii.

P. 194. l. 9. *Stained with the recent ſlaughter of a friend, a brother, or a parent.*] The ſituation of the unfortunate ſufferer on this occaſion, is exactly ſimilar to that of Priam, ſo pathetically deſcribed by Homer.

Τὸν δ' ἔλαθ' εἰσελθὼν Πρίαμος μέγας· ἄγχι δ' ἄρα στὰς,
Χερσὶν Ἀχιλλῆος λάβε γούνατα, καὶ κύσε χεῖρας
Δεινὰς, ἀνδροφόνους, αἳ οἱ πολέας κλάνον υἱάς.
Iliad. Ω. l. 477.

P. 197. l. 11. *But the boundleſs luſt of Mahomet,* &c.] The impoſtor limited his followers to the number of four wives, [ſee Koran, chap. iv.] whilſt he himſelf, according to Abu'l Feda (p. 147.) had no leſs than fifteen,

fifteen, beſides concubines. But this was a peculiar privilege founded on the expreſs words of God himſelf. "O prophet, we "have allowed thee thy wives, unto whom "thou haſt given their dower, and alſo the "ſlaves which thy right hand poſſeſſeth, of "the booty which God hath granted thee; "and the daughters of thy uncle, and the "daughters of thy aunts, both on thy father's "ſide, and on thy mother's ſide, who have "fled with thee from Mecca; and any other "believing woman, if ſhe give herſelf unto "the prophet: in caſe the prophet deſireth "to take her to wife. This is a peculiar pri-"vilege granted unto thee, above the reſt of "the true believers." Kor. chap. xxxiii.

P. 201. l. 15. *Now ſelecting the temple of Jeruſalem, and now that of Mecca.*] See Abu'l Fed. p. 54.

P. 202. l. 3. *We ſee his ſteps every where marked with blood and deſolation.*] The impetuous courage of Mahomet, and the cruelty and devaſtation with which the progreſs of his impoſture was attended, reminds us of the character which the Roman poet has given of Cæſar. Nothing ſurely can be more deſcriptive of the Arabian conqueror than the following lines.

" Acer et indomitus, quo ſpes, quoque ira
" vocâſſet,
" Ferre manum, & nunquam temerandâ
" parcere ferro :
" Succeſſus urgere ſuos ———
——— " Impellens, quicquid ſibi ſumma
" petenti
" Obſtaret ; gaudenſque viam feciſſe ruinâ."
Lucan, lib. i. l. 146.

P. 203. l. 12. *Precluded from the peruſal of books and the uſe of writing.*] In the xxixth chapter of the Koran, Mahomet introduces God as thus addreſſing him : " Thou couldeſt " not read any book before this ; neither could- " eſt thou write it with thy right hand : for then " had the gainſayers juſtly doubted of the di- " vine original thereof." Hence his followers, inſtead of being aſhamed of this pretended ignorance of their maſter, affect to glory in it, as affording a deciſive proof of his divine miſſion, and frequently call him (as indeed he ſtyles himſelf in the Koran) " the illi- " terate prophet."

P. 204. l. 12. *He not only expreſſed a deſire to exerciſe, but actually practiſed that very art,* &c.] " *Narrabat* Anas *ex* Al-Barâo *inquiens :* " Menſe *Dhu'l-Ka'ada* (anni *Hegiræ* ſexti), " Apoſtolus Dei Viſitationem-ſacram indix-

" erat: Sed *Meccenſes* noluerunt ei facultatem " concedere *Meccam* intrandi. Poſtmodum " verò, (pace inita) ſtipulatus eſt cum illis ſe " per treſ dies tantùm *Meccæ*, (ad Viſitationem " complendam), moraturum. Ubi autem ad " ſcribendum Diploma acceſſerunt, ſcripſere " (Mohammedis Scribæ): *Hæ ſunt conditiones,* " *quas nobiſcum ſtipulatus eſt* MOHAMMED A- " POSTOLUS DEI. Ibi *(Meccenſes)* dixerunt: " *Hujuſmodi nequaquam ratum habebimus: Nos* " *enim (volumus ſcribi):* MOHAMMED AB- " DO'LLAHI *filius.* Tunc ad *Alim* dixit: *De-* " *leto iſtud,* APOSTOLUS DEI. At ille, *Mi-* " *nimè verò,* inquit, *Per Deum! Non delebo te* " *in æternum.* Mox Apoſtolus Dei Chiro- " graphum accepit, et quamvis prorſus ſcrib- " endi imperitus eſſet, ſcripſit: *Hæ ſunt con-* " *ditiones, quas ſtipulatur* MOHAMMED AB- " DO'LLAHI *filius: Non ingredietur* Meccam " *armatus, niſi tantum accinctus gladio, eoque in* " *vagina recondito: Neminem ex ejus civibus* " *ſecum inde exire compellet, ſi iſte civis in ea* " *remanere voluerit,* &c." Al-Bochari.

" Cum autem invaleſceret ægritudo ejus, " dixit, *Afferte mihi atramentum et chartam,* " *ut ſcribam vobis Librum, quo poſt obitum* " *meum non erretis in æternum.*" Abu'l Feda, p. 186.

The Mahometans indeed have recourſe to a miracle to account for the former of theſe inſtances, and aſcribe the latter to a delirium under which the prophet laboured, from the violence of his diſeaſe. It is, however, far more probable to ſuppoſe that in theſe trying ſituations the impoſtor for a while forgot the ignorance which he had aſſumed, and diſcovered his real character.

P. 212. l. 3. *Contributes a new, a ſtriking, and peculiar ſpecies of evidence for the truth of his religion.*] In the form of didactic precept in which the Koran is written, and under that authority of a maſter which its author aſſumes, it was not difficult for him to impoſe upon the ſimple and unſuſpecting minds of followers, who were intereſted in the ſucceſs of his arms, and to whom the idea of his divine commiſſion was welcome, as affording the ſpirit and ſupport of their party: nor is there a neceſſity for recurring to any other cauſe for the admiration in which this compoſition is ſtill held, than that principle of attachment with which all men are diſpoſed to regard the earlieſt productions of their country.

But different is the manner in which the doctrines of Chriſtianity are communicated to us, and devoid of the advantages of which

Mahomet

Mahomet availed himſelf, is the ſimple and hiſtorical form under which the Biographers of Jeſus Chriſt repreſent him. Uninveſted with the impoſing character of maſter, unadorned with the ſplendour of conqueſt, *his* hiſtorians bring him forward to our view, only as the apparent brother and equal of human kind. It is to the innocence and ſimplicity of his life, more perhaps than to the powers with which he was inveſted, that they call the attention of men; and while thus artleſsly, in the common ſcenes and amidſt the humble duties of life, they diſplay the character of their maſter, they leave the truth of his pretenſion to be ſupported in every future age, as it was left in the age which was diſtinguiſhed by his appearance, by the unprejudiced reaſoning and inference of mankind.

In this mode of compoſition no arts are employed to excite aſtoniſhment, or to impoſe upon credulity. The conduct of the man is united with the pretenſions of the teacher. The life of him who aſſumed to himſelf the title of the Saviour of the world, is related with the ſame ſimplicity as that of the loweſt of our kind; and no other admiration is claimed from its narration, than

what is due to the ſtricteſt form of hiſtorical truth.

That the *manner*, therefore, in which the Goſpels are written, is not eſteemed as grand and unequivocal a teſtimony of the truth of Chriſtianity, as that of the Koran is by the followers of Mahomet, can only be aſcribed to that ſplendor of evidence, in which this comparatively meaner one is loſt; being too diſtant and refined to affect the generality of mankind.

P. 240. l. 21. *To exemplify theſe extraordinary qualities and virtues in the actions of that life*, &c.] A more regular and minute diſcuſſion of Chriſt's life and actions does not fall within the deſign of theſe Sermons. Biſhop NEWCOME has indeed exhauſted the ſubject in a work which does equal honour to the piety, taſte, and learning of its excellent Author. See *Obſervations on our Lord's Conduct as a Divine Inſtructor, and on the Excellence of his Moral Character.*

P. 272. l. 14. *And more particularly by Chriſt in the Goſpel.*] And when Jeſus the ſon of Mary ſaid, "O Children of Iſrael, verily I am "the Apoſtle of God ſent unto you, confirming "the law which was delivered before me,

"and

"and bringing good tidings of an apostle "who shall come after me, and whose name "shall be [g] AHMED." Kor. chap. lxi.

A similar prediction is impiously ascribed to Christ in the spurious Gospel which bears the name of St. Barnabas; a work, which (as I have already observed [h]) probably was originally forged by heretical Christians, and has since been interpolated to support the pretensions of Mahomet. The Arabic original still exists in the East [i]: and translations both into the Italian and Spanish languages are preserved in Europe. By the obliging communication of the Rev. Dr. MONKHOUSE, of Queen's College, who has in his possession an ancient MS. containing the whole Spanish version, and also a translation of a considerable part of the work into literal English, I am enabled to give my readers some specimens of this audacious forgery, and of the manner in which the gospel history has been here corrupted, so as to accommodate it to the interests and assertions of the Koran.

g *Ahmed* is derived from the same root, and signifies the same as *Mahomet*, or *Mahomet*.

h Sermon vii. p. 358.

i See *Sale's* Prelim. Discour. p. 74.

Chap.

Chap. 96.

"And when Jeſus had ended his prayer, "the High Prieſt cried with a loud voice, "Stay Jeſus, we want to know who thou art, "for the quiet of our people. He anſwered, "I am Jeſus of Nazareth, born of Mary, of "the ſtock of David, a mortal man, and "fear God, and ſeek his honour and glory. "The High Prieſt ſaid, It is written in "the book of Moſes, that God is to ſend "the Meſſias, who will come and declare the "truth, and will bring mercy with him, and "therefore we deſire thee to tell us, if thou "art the Meſſias whom we expect? Jeſus "ſaid, It is true that God hath ſo promiſed, "but I am not he: for he was created be-"fore me. The High Prieſt ſaid, By thy "words and ſigns we know that thou art a "prophet and a ſaint of God; and therefore "I intreat thee in his name and for his ſake, "that thou tell us how the Meſſias will come. "Jeſus anſwered, as God liveth, I am not "that Meſſias which the tribes of the earth "wait for, as God promiſed by our father "Abraham, ſaying, in thy family I will bleſs "all tribes. But when God ſhall take me "out of the world, Satan will again promote

"this

" this curſed ſedition, making the wicked be-
" lieve that I am the Son of God. My
" words and doctrine will be corrupted, in-
" ſomuch that ſcarce thirty faithful ſhall be
" found. Then will God have mercy on his
" people, and will ſend his meſſenger into
" the world, by whom he hath created all
" things: and he will come from the South
" with power, and will deſtroy Idolaters, and
" take away from Satan the empire that he
" has over men, and will bring the mercy of
" God and ſalvation to thoſe that ſhall be-
" lieve him. Bleſſed are thoſe that ſhall be-
" lieve him.

Chap. 97.

" I that am unworthy to looſe his ſhoes,
" have had the favour to ſee him. The Pre-
" ſident, High Prieſt, and Herod ſaid, Diſ-
" turb not thyſelf, Jeſus the ſaint of God,
" for in our time there will be no more ſedi-
" tion: for we will write to the holy ſenate
" of Rome, that by an imperial decree none
" may call thee God. Jeſus ſaid, I am not
" comforted with this; for from whence ye
" hope for light, darkneſs will come. But
" my conſolation is in the coming of the
" Meſſenger

"Meſſenger of God, who will deſtroy all "falſe opinions concerning me; and his law "ſhall run through the whole world; for ſo "God promiſed our father Abraham. And "above all, my comfort is, that his faith "ſhall have no end, but ſhall be inviolable, "and preſerved by God. The High Prieſt "ſaid, Will any more prophets appear after "the coming of the Meſſias? Jeſus an-"ſwered, There will come no more true pro-"phets ſent by God: but there will come "many falſe prophets, for which I grieve; "becauſe they will be ſtirred up by Satan, "by the juſt judgment of God, and they will "ſhelter themſelves with my Goſpel. Herod, "ſaid, How is it the juſt judgment of God, "that ſuch wicked men ſhould come? Jeſus "ſaid, It is juſt that he that believes not the "truth to his ſalvation, ſhould believe a lie "to his condemnation; for the world deſ-"piſeth the good and believeth the bad, as is "ſeen in the time of Micheas and Jeremias: "for every one loveth his like. The High "Prieſt ſaid, What will the Meſſias be call-"ed, and how ſhall his coming and manner "of life be known? Jeſus anſwered, The "name of the meſſenger of God is ADMIR-

"ABLE

"ABLE[k]; for God himſelf gave it him "after he had created his ſoul and placed it "in celeſtial brightneſs. God ſaid, Obſerve "Mohammed, for I will for thy ſake create "paradiſe and the world with a great number "of creatures, of which I make thee a pre- "ſent: ſo that whoſoever ſhall bleſs thee "ſhall be bleſſed, and whoſoever ſhall curſe "thee ſhall be curſed. And when I ſhall "ſend thee into the world I will ſend thee for "my meſſenger of ſalvation, and thy words "ſhall be true; ſo that heaven and earth "ſhall fail, but they ſhall never fail in thy "law. Mohammed is his bleſſed name. "Then the multitude lift up their voices and "ſaid, Send us, O our God, thy meſſen- "ger; come preſently, O Mohammed, for "the ſalvation of the world."

P. 256. l. 15. *By the advocates of Mahometaniſm the Koran has been always held forth as the greateſt of Miracles.*] "Auctor celebris "Abu Mohammed Moſtapha Ebnalſaib Ha- "ſan, cognomine Gennabi, aſſerit *Alcoranum* "*continere ſexaginta millia miracula.* Ahmed "filius Abdo'l Halim in ſua apologia affirmat "*Alcoranum eſſe majus miraculum, quam ſuſcita-*

[k] This is an alluſion to the name of Mohammed, which is a participle paſſive from the Arabic verb *hamada, to praiſe, to commend.*

"*tionem*

" *tionem mortuorum: et excellenter continet* " *omnes alios ſacros libros; et complecti omnia* " *tempora, præterita, præſentia, et futura.* Al- " gazel in profeſſione fidei Mahometicæ profi- " tetur, Alcoranum eſſe *æternum, ſubſiſtentem* " *eſſentia Dei.*" Maracci de Alcorano, p. 43, 44.

P. 259. l. 11. *In the language of Arabia alſo.*] Of the language of Arabia, in the time of Mahomet, there were ſeveral diſtinct dialects. The grand diſtinction, however, was that which ſubſiſted between the language of the tribes of Hamyar and Koreiſh. That of Hamyar is ſaid to have been the moſt ancient, and to have approached neareſt in its genius and ſignification to the Hebrew and Syriac. The dialect of Koreiſh was, however, univerſally eſteemed the moſt elegant, and in oppoſition to the other was called *the pure Arabic.* The ſuperior degree of refinement which the tribe of Koreiſh had introduced into their language, aroſe from various cauſes; from their diſtinguiſhed rank as guardians of the temple of Mecca; from their ſituation, almoſt in the centre of Arabia, which precluded them from ſuch an intercourſe with foreigners, as might have corrupted their language; and above all, from the continual

reſort

reſort of the ſeveral tribes to Mecca; which gave them ar opportunity of ſelecting from their diſcourſe and compoſitions ſuch words and expreſſions as they deemed moſt elegant, and thus gradually of transfuſing the various beauties of the whole language into their own dialect. In this dialect the Koran is written; and of this purity and perſpicuity of his language Mahomet frequently boaſts. See Pococke's Specim. p. 150, 151, 152. Koran, p. 223.

P. 251. l. 15. *There is indeed no evidence of the authenticity of any compoſitions*, &c.] The high veneration with which the ſcriptures have been reſpected, and that ſuſpicious jealouſy with which they have been guarded both by Jews and Chriſtians of every ſect, even from the earlieſt ages, afford a ſtrong argument againſt the charge of corruption. The Jews, in particular, are ſaid to have carried this regard even to the exceſs of ſuperſtition. Their laborious zeal has prompted ſome among them to number the chapters, the ſentences, and even the words contained in their ſcriptures: and they have further remarked, how often, and in what form, each word occurs throughout the whole. Their accuracy and caution in tranſcribing their ſacred

ered volumes was, if poſſible, ſtill greater. One of their Rabbins[1] has enumerated no leſs than twenty precepts concerning this matter, the ſtricteſt and moſt cautious which ſuperſtitious zeal could dictate. Their ſcriptures were not confined to the hands of a few intereſted individuals, their prieſts or their rulers; but were diſperſed at large throughout the whole body of the Jewiſh nation: they were publicly read in the ſynagogues every ſabbath, where they were likewiſe depoſited under the immediate ſanction of public authority, and preſerved with an awful veneration, which in the preſent age will, perhaps, with difficulty be conceived or credited. Every, even the moſt accidental, mark of diſreſpect was deemed a crime, which nothing leſs than rigorous mortification could expiate.

P. 273. l. 14. *The very exceptions to this general poſition are few, and contribute additional proofs in favour of the ſacred text.*] Trifling variations are by no means ſufficient to deprive any writings of their claim to the character of purity. If this ſhould be admitted, the authenticity of every compoſition which has paſſed through the hands of tran-

[1] Rabbi Moſes, in Tractatu de Lib. Leg. cap. 10.

ſcribers,

ſcribers, and tranſlators, is at once deſtroyed; for ſince all are unavoidably ſubject to ſuch errors, all muſt of courſe be involved in one common cenſure. It may be further obſerved, that on this ground, ſtrong objections might be made to the Koran itſelf, as well as to our Scriptures. That too has its various readings, in the accurate collection of which the laborious induſtry of Mahometan commentators has been frequently employed. Different copies differ materially in the titles of the chapters, the number of verſes, the diſtinction of periods, and other particulars which ſtrongly affect the ſenſe.

The Koran of the Perſians and the Shiites differs in many places from that of the Turks and Sonnites, even in eſſential points. Yet that any argument can be drawn from hence againſt the purity and integrity of their ſcriptures, the followers of Mahomet abſolutely and univerſally deny.

P. 275. l. 17. *That no ſuch corruption as he pretended, has ever happened to our ſcriptures.*] Whilſt we defend the integrity of our ſcriptures againſt the abſurd and futile objections of Mahomet and his deluded followers, we ſhould be careful leſt by our own injudicious conduct we give occaſion to a ſimilar

charge. A ſerious and thinking man cannot but be alarmed at that unbounded licence of conjecture, and that extravagant rage for correction and alteration of the ſacred text, which has been too often indulged by pious, though injudicious commentators. That the text of every edition which we poſſeſs, ſtands frequently in need of emendation, cannot perhaps be denied. But the proper mode of emendations ſeems to be, not by fanciful ſpeculation and conjecture, but by *facts*; by a compariſon of ancient MSS. and ancient verſions. Much too is to be effected towards the illuſtration of obſcure and difficult paſſages of ſcripture, by an accurate knowledge of the cognate languages, and by an attention to the manners and cuſtoms of eaſtern nations.

P. 304. *Further Obſervations on Miracles.*

In judging of Miracles there are certain criteria, peculiar to the ſubject, ſufficient to conduct our enquiries, and warrant our determination. Aſſuredly they do not appeal to our ignorance, for they preſuppoſe, not only

only the exiſtence of a general order of things, but our actual knowledge of the appearance that order exhibits, and of the ſecondary material cauſes, from which it, in moſt caſes, proceeds. If a miraculous event were effected by the immediate hand of God, and yet bore no mark of diſtinction from the ordinary effects of his agency, it would impreſs no conviction, and probably awaken no attention.

Our knowledge of the ordinary courſe of things, though limited, is real, and therefore it is eſſential to a Miracle, both that it differ from that courſe, and be accompanied with peculiar and unequivocal ſigns of ſuch difference.

But as the term NATURE is frequently uſed, and ſometimes abuſed, in the controverſy upon this ſubject, I beg leave to ſtate, in a few words, my own ideas. The courſe of nature is, we are told, fixed and unalterable, and therefore it is not conſiſtent with the immutability of God, to perform Miracles. But ſurely, they who reaſon in this manner, beg the point in queſtion. We have no right to aſſume, that the Deity has ordained ſuch general laws as will exclude his interpoſition, and we cannot ſuppoſe that he

would forbear to interfere, where any important end could be anſwered. This interpoſition, though it controuls, in particular caſes, the energy, does not diminiſh the utility of thoſe laws. It leaves them to fulfil their own proper purpoſes, and only effects a diſtinct purpoſe for which they were not calculated.

Let us, however, aſk, what is meant by this ſtability in the order of Nature? Gravitation is known by experience, and acts according to rules, which repeated obſervation has enabled us to aſcertain: yet Magnetiſm, of which the rules are doubtleſs equally fixed, though more imperfectly known, ſuſpends the force of gravitation. Is nature then uncertain in her operations, or ſhould we not rather ſay, that in different circumſtances her agency is different? Have not both their proper ſphere of action, and does it betray any credulity in admitting the evidence of thoſe who have marked their oppoſite effects? In certain circumſtances we may have ſtrong reaſon to expect, that the one would act rather than the other. But by a competent witneſs of the fact, we ſhould ſoon be perſuaded to believe, that a Phenomenon, however extraordinary in itſelf, and however different from our pre-conceived opinions, real-

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ly exiſted. If the courſe of Nature implies the general laws of matter and motion, into which the moſt oppoſite phenomena may be reſolved, it is certain, that we do not yet know them in their full extent; and therefore that events, which are related by judicious and diſintereſted perſons, and at the ſame time imply no groſs contradiction, are poſſible in themſelves, and capable of a certain degreee of proof.

If the courſe of nature implies the whole order of events, which God has ordained for the government of the world, it includes both his ordinary and extraordinary diſpenſations, and among them Miracles may have their place, as a part of the univerſal plan. It is, indeed, conſiſtent with ſound philoſophy and not inconſiſtent with pure religion, to acknowledge that they were diſpoſed by the ſupreme Being at the ſame time with the more ordinary effects of his power; that their cauſes and occaſions were arranged with the ſame regularity; and that in reference chiefly to their concomitant circumſtances of perſons, and times, to the ſpecific ends for which they were employed, and to our idea of the immediate neceſſity there is for a divine agent, Miracles differ from common events, in which

the hand of God acts as efficaciouſly, though leſs viſibly. On this conſideration of the ſubject, Miracles, inſtead of contradicting Nature, form a part of it: and all I object to is, that what our limited reaſon, and ſcanty experience may comprehend, ſhould be repreſented as a full and exact view of the poſſible or actual varieties which exiſt in the work of God.

Are we then aſked, whether miracles be CREDIBLE? We reply, that abſtractedly conſidered, they are not totally incredible; that they are capable of indirect proof from analogy; and of direct from teſtimony; that in the common and daily courſe of worldly affairs, events, the improbability of which, antecedently to all teſtimony, was very great, is overcome and deſtroyed by the authority of competent and honeſt witneſſes; that the Chriſtian Miracles were objects of real and proper experience to thoſe who ſaw them; and that whatſoever the ſenſes of mankind can perceive, their report may ſubſtantiate.

Should it be aſked, Whether Miracles were NECESSARY? and whether the end propoſed to be effected by them, could warrant ſo immediate and extraordinary an interference of the Almighty, as ſuch extraordinary operations

tions ſuppoſe? To this we might anſwer, that if the fact be eſtabliſhed, all reaſonings *a priori* concerning their neceſſity muſt be frivolous, and may be falſe. We are not capable of deciding on a queſtion, which, however ſimple in appearance, is yet too complex in its parts, and too extenſive in its object, to be fully comprehended by the human underſtanding. We know not what event is neceſſary, or what means are requiſite to effect it. Events apparently inſignificant are frequently combined with others of the greateſt magnitude and importance, and indeed ſo combined as to be inſeparable from them; nay to have been the conditional cauſes without which they could not be produced, and even the efficient cauſes which actually produced them.

Whether God could, or could not, have effected all the ends deſigned to be promoted by the goſpel, without deviating from the common courſe of his providence, and interfering with its general laws, is a ſpeculation that a modeſt enquirer would carefully avoid; for it carries on the very face of it a degree of preſumption totally unbecoming the ſtate of a mortal being. Infinitely ſafer is it for us to acquieſce in what the Almighty has done,

than to embarraſs our minds with ſpeculations about what he might have done. Enquiries of this kind are generally inconcluſive, and always uſeleſs. They reſt on no ſolid principles, are conducted by no fixed rules, and lead to no clear conviction. They begin from curioſity or vanity; they are proſecuted amidſt ignorance and error; and they frequently terminate in impious preſumption or univerſal ſcepticiſm.

He that arraigns the neceſſity of an extraordinary providence, may in the end, queſtion even the exiſtence of an ordinary one: for when the genius of wild and undiſtinguiſhing enquiry is once let looſe on ground where there are no direct paths, and no ſettled limits, who can tell whither the extravagant and impetuous ſpirit may be carried?

God is the beſt, and indeed the only judge, how far Miracles are proper to promote any particular deſign of his providence: and how far that deſign would have been left unaccompliſhed, if common and ordinary methods only had been purſued. So from the abſence of Miracles we may conclude, in any ſuppoſed caſe, that they were not neceſſary; from their exiſtence, ſupported by fair teſtimony, in any

given caſe, we may infer with confidence that they are proper.

Now we are not only capable of oppoſing one conjecture to another, and of confronting an objection founded on metaphyſical ſpeculations by an anſwer of the ſame kind; but we may proceed on grounds yet more ſolid and ſatisfactory. A view of the ſtate of the world in general, and of the Jewiſh nation in particular, and an examination of the nature and tendency of the chriſtian religion, will point out very clearly the great expediency of a miraculous interpoſition; and when we reflect on the gracious and important ends that were to be effected by it we ſhall be convinced that it was not an idle and uſeleſs diſplay of divine power; but that while the means effected and confirmed the end, the end fully juſtified and illuſtrated the means.

If we reflect on the almoſt irreſiſtible force of prejudice, and the ſtrong oppoſition it univerſally made to the eſtabliſhment of a new religion on the demolition of rites and ceremonies, which authority had made ſacred, and cuſtom had familiarized; if we reflect on the extent and importance, as well as the ſingularity of the Chriſtian plan; what was its avowed purpoſe to effect, and what difficul-

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ties it was neceſſarily called to ſtruggle with, before that purpoſe could be effected; how much it was oppoſed by the opinions and by the practice of the generality of mankind; by philoſophy; by ſuperſtition; by corrupt paſſions, and by inveterate habits; by pride, and ſenſuality; in ſhort, by every engine of human influence, whether formed by craft, or aided by power; if we ſeriouſly reflect on theſe things, and give them their due force (and experience ſhews us that we can ſcarcely give them too much) we ſhall be induced to admit even the neceſſity of a miraculous interpoſition, at a time when common means muſt inevitably, in our apprehenſions, have failed of ſucceſs.

The revelation of the divine will by inſpired perſons is, as ſuch, miraculous; and therefore before the adverſaries of the goſpel can employ with propriety their objections to the particular Miracles on which its credibility is reſted, they ſhould ſhew the impoſſibility of any revelation whatſoever. If they grant, what indeed they cannot diſprove, the poſſible exiſtence of a revelation, it is abſurd to ſay, that the Deity can interfere in the act of revealing his will, and cannot, in ſupplying evidences for the reality of his interference.

ference. In whatſoever age the revelation be given, ſucceeding ages can know it only from teſtimony; and if they admit on the report of their fellow-creatures, that God had inſpired any being with the preternatural knowledge of his will, why ſhould they deny, that he had enabled the ſame being to heal the ſick, or to cleanſe the leprous? And how, may it be aſked, ſhould the divine Teacher give a more direct and conſiſtent proof of his preternatural commiſſion, than by diſplaying thoſe ſigns and wonders, which mark the finger of God?

As then the fact itſelf implies no impoſſibility, the credibility of it will depend upon the character of thoſe who report it, and on the end which it profeſſes to purſue.

That the Apoſtles could not be deceived, and that they had no temptation to deceive, has been repeatedly demonſtrated; and ſo powerful is the proof adduced in ſupport of their teſtimony, that the infidels of theſe later days have been obliged to abandon the ground on which their predeceſſors ſtood; to diſclaim all moral evidences ariſing from the character and relation of eye-witneſſes; and to maintain upon metaphyſical, rather than hiſtorical principles, that Miracles are utterly incapable

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in their own nature of exiſting in any circumſtances, or of being ſupported by any evidence.

To illuſtrate theſe general obſervations on the ſubject of Miracles by an induction of particular inſtances, would be unneceſſary. Thoſe inſtances have been frequently adduced, and ably enforced by ſeveral eminent writers, and never more ſucceſsfuly than by one*, whoſe long and well-ſpent life has been uſeful to the world, and ornamental to the learned body to which he belongs; whoſe erudition derives freſh luſtre from his virtues, and whoſe character is equally venerable as a defender of the Chriſtian faith, and as a pattern of Chriſtian meekneſs and benevolence.

P. 335. l. 13. *When the Caliph Omar, the contemporary and companion of Mahomet, was ſolicited to ſpare the celebrated library of Alexandria, he replied to this effect:*] See Abu'l Pharaj. Hiſt. Dynaſt. p. 180. Harris's Philological Enquiries, p. 251. Modern Univ. Hiſt. vol. i. p. 498.

P. 341. l. 5. *Mahomet ſeems to have entertained very groſs and miſtaken ideas of the Chriſtian Trinity.*] If we trace the Chriſtian religion through the various revolutions of the

* See Dr. Adams's judicious Reply to Mr. Hume.

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church, we ſhall obſerve two doctrines which, beyond all the reſt, mark with a diſtinguiſhing luſtre the creed which juſtly deſerves the appellation of Catholic. Explications of thoſe doctrines may vary; but the grand eſſentials of them ſeem to be interwoven with the original texture of Chriſtian faith, I mean the doctrines of the DIVINITY and ATONEMENT of Chriſt: doctrines alike unknown to the Koran of Mahomet and the Creed of Socinus.

Yet notwithſtanding this remarkable coincidence of opinion, there is ſcarcely any thing which the modern Socinian affects to regard with greater abhorrence and indignation, than a compariſon that aſſociates his own tenets with thoſe of Mahomet. To the eye of reaſon, however, the ſimilarity is clear and apparent. The title of Unitarian is equally boaſted of by the diſciple of Socinus and the follower of the Arabian prophet. Both of them reject the Divinity of our Lord; and with a confidence wholly unbecoming a being whoſe faculties are ſo bounded as man's, both of them maintain the impoſſibility of a three-fold mode of ſubſiſtence in the divine nature, becauſe the human intellect is incapable of forming any preciſe ideas of the ſubject: as if nothing could be

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real in the eſſence of the divinity, which is not level to the comprehenſion of man! The objections of both to this ſublime myſtery proceed on the ſame preſumptions. I call them *preſumptions*; for they merit no better title. The appeal to reaſon will not be granted, till reaſon is proved to be infallible. Its objections are brought from an imperfect faculty, exerciſed in a limited ſphere. But the doctrine I am now ſpeaking of, as it was not of its diſcovery, ſo neither is it a ſubject for its inveſtigation. Reaſon has no data in itſelf on which to proceed, either for finding it out independently of a divine revelation; or for ſcrutinizing it, when it is revealed.

Metaphyſical arguments and reaſonings a priori muſt at beſt be precarious and unſatisfactory. Beings, formed as we are, muſt derive conviction from another quarter. We can only reaſon from what we know: and where we have no grounds in that ſpecies of evidence which falls within the ſphere of human obſervation, we muſt reſt ſatisfied with our ignorance. But if a revelation is given to ſupply the defects of natural knowledge, and unfold ſuch doctrines as reaſon could have formed no conception of; inſtead of cavilling

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at their myſterioufneſs, we ought ſilently and gratefully to acquieſce in their truth.

But the Socinian and the Mahometan object to our doctrine its inconſiſtency with human reaſon. The objection ſuppoſes that man is poſſeſſed of a larger comprehenſion than falls to the lot of mortality; and that what he cannot underſtand, cannot be true.

We appeal to the ſcriptures. But the Mahometans and Socinians have both diſcovered the ſame methods of interpretation; and either by falſe gloſſes pervert their plain and obvious meaning; or when the teſtimony is ſo direct and explicit, that no forced conſtruction can evade it, they have recourſe to the laſt artifice of abortive zeal; the cry of interpolation!

If the Mahometan denies, like the Phantomiſt of more ancient times, the reality of the ſufferings and death of Chriſt, as repreſented by the evangeliſts; the Socinian, by denying their efficacy, ſinks them to the level of common martyrdom: and though the facts themſelves be not queſtioned, yet their deſign and end is totally loſt in the creed of Socinus.

"But let God be true, and every man a liar."

liar." If theſe are the doctrines of the goſpel, let us receive them whether Mahometans be converted, or not. Let us deliver and defend the truth, let the ſucceſs of it be what it will.

There is no period of the Chriſtian church in which the Divinity of Chriſt was not admitted as a primary article: nor can the enemies of this doctrine point out the *time* when if it be a falſity, it was admitted as a truth: much leſs can they *account* for its admiſſion into the ſeveral ſymbols of Chriſtian faith in the very firſt ages, if it was a doctrine unknown to Chriſt and his Apoſtles. The Socinian hypotheſis ſtaggers all ſpeculation. It is contrary to every maxim of hiſtorical evidence; and if purſued to its obvious conſequences, includes in it the overthrow of Chriſtianity, and renders every record of every age ſuſpicious and uncertain. It reverſes the common rules by which we judge of paſt events; and in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of the expreſſion, makes the *firſt*, *laſt*, and the *laſt*, *firſt*;—makes the leſs ſuperior to the greater; and what is doubtful and partial, more deciſive than what is full, clear, and certain.

Examine Socinianiſm by any rule of hiſtory that has been adopted for the trial of any fact,

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or the determination that has been paſſed on any opinion, and we can ſcarcely avoid ſeeing its utter inconſiſtency with the univerſal creed of the Chriſtian church from the earlieſt period of its exiſtence to the preſent time.

Is it then probable that the whole church ſhould have formed a wrong idea, not only of a few circumſtantial points, but of matters of the higheſt conſequence, through every period in which we are capable of tracing the hiſtory of its opinions? If Chriſt was nothing more than a *mere man*, how can it be accounted for, that his DIVINITY ſhould be the general and current ſentiment of the church in ſo early a period as the preſent enemies of the doctrine are obliged to acknowledge it was? It was acknowledged by thoſe who were the immediate followers of the apoſtles: and when heretics who oppoſed the doctrine aroſe, they were anſwered in ſet treatiſes by thoſe who may juſtly be called the great guardians of the church, and whoſe particular buſineſs it was to explain, illuſtrate, and defend its doctrines. What they delivered on this ſubject, they delivered not as their own private ſpeculations, but as the known and avowed ſenſe of the Catholic church. They were only the inſtruments of communicating this ſenſe of

Chriſtian doctrines to the world. They did not pride themſelves on the novelties of invention. They came forward with an eſtabliſhed rule in their hands; and were happy to be eſteemed not *the ſetters forth of ſtrange doctrines*, but the plain aſſertors of old and acknowledged truths.

Socinianiſm makes every thing doubtful. And no wonder—while it makes ſo little of the moſt expreſs declarations of ſcripture, we need not be ſurpriſed that it ſhould pay ſo little reſpect to the plaineſt evidence of hiſtory.

Some late attempts on the Chriſtian ſyſtem have alarmed the fears of more modeſt and humble believers. The attempts, however, though artfully conducted, have defeated their own end. The zeal of innovation has ſtretched beyond its own meaſure: and ſober Chriſtians have been rather ſhocked by its daring outrages, than ſtaggered in their faith by its ſpecioufneſs and ſophiſtry.

If the attempts had ſucceeded, we ſhould have had little remaining but the name of Chriſtianity: and that in the end would have yielded to a name more grateful to thoſe who would rob it of its diſtinguiſhing honours.

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The gradation from Socinianiſm to Deiſm is very ſlight; and eſpecially that ſpecies of Socinianiſm which has been patronized by a writer, who in order to ſupport it has thought proper to abandon the inſpiration of the ſcriptures; and has made no ſcruple to call the apoſtle St. Paul an inconcluſive reaſoner*. On ſuch a footing Socinianiſm may poſſibly maintain its ground. But on ſuch a footing Deiſm may maintain its ground much better: and it is rather wonderful that thoſe who have given up ſo much, ſhould retain any thing. For what is there in Chriſtianity, when all its diſtinguiſhing doctrines are taken away, that could render it a ſubject worthy of a particular revelation? Did the ſtupendous miracles that were wrought to introduce and eſtabliſh it in the world, and the train of prophecies which were gradually diſcloſed to point out its high and illuſtrious origin, find an end ſuitable to their extraordinary nature?

Morality, and a future ſtate, include the whole of Chriſtianity according to the repreſentation of a Socinian. But ſuppoſe a Deiſt ſhould adopt (as many have, and juſtly may) the ſame morality, and the ſame ſanctions on

* Corruptions of Chriſtianity, vol. ii. p. 370.

the ground of natural evidence, wherein lies the eſſential and diſcriminating characteriſtic of Chriſtianity? Where lies the real difference between a believer in divine revelation and a religious theiſt?

Socinianiſm cuts to the very root of all that is diſtinguiſhing in the goſpel. It deſtroys the neceſſity, and even the importance of a miraculous interpoſition, and gives the infidel too great reaſon to exclaim, that all that was extraordinary was ſuperfluous: and that the apparatus was too expenſive and too ſplendid for the purpoſes to which it was applied.

This ſeems to be an argument a priori againſt that ſpecies of Chriſtianity, which ſome, under the pretence of refining it from corruption, would reduce to the level of natural religion.

P. 349. l. 20. *That romantic fable of the angel of death*] Vide Koran, p. 339. l. 9. Mill. Diſſert. de Mohammediſmo ante Moham. p. 82. Hyde in Notis ad Bobov. de Viſit. Ægrot. p. 19. R. Elias, in Tiſhbi. See alſo Buxtorf. Synag. Judaic. et Lexic. Talmud.

Ibid. l. 25. *That imaginary, yet dreaded tribunal.*] Vide Al Gazal. apud Maracc. Prodr.

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ad Refut. Alcoran. part. iii. p. 90. col. 1. Mill. Diſſert. de Mohammediſmo, &c. p. 76. et ejuſdem Orat. Inaugur. p. 14.

P. 350. l. 9. *The vaſt but ideal balance.*] Vide Koran, p. 286. l. 10. Mill. Diſſert. de Mohammediſmo, &c. p. 81, 82, 83. Sale's Prelim. Diſc. p. 89.

P. 358. l. 14. *We are there told,* &c.] The whole hiſtory is thus related in *the Goſpel of Barnabas*: and as the repreſentation which it gives, though falſe and abſurd, is yet novel and curious, I make no apology to my readers for quoting it at large.

Chap. ccxvi.

" Judas came near to the people with whom " Jeſus was; and when he heard the noiſe " he entered into the houſe where the diſci- " ples ſlept. And God ſeeing the fear and " danger of his ſervant, ordered Gabriel and " Michael, and Rafael and Azrael to carry " him out of the world. And they came in " all haſte, and bare him out of the window " which looks towards the ſouth. And they " placed him in the third heaven, where he " will remain bleſſing God, in the company of " angels, till near the end of the world.

Chap. ccxvii.

" And Judas the traitor entered before the " reſt into the place from which Jeſus had " juſt been taken up. And the diſciples were " ſleeping. And the wonderful God acted " wonderfully, changing Judas into the ſame " figure and ſpeech with Jeſus. We believ- " ing that it was he, ſaid to him, Maſter, " whom ſeekeſt thou? And he ſaid to them, " ſmiling, Ye have forgotten yourſelves, ſince " ye do not know Judas Iſcariot.

" At this time the ſoldiery entered; and " ſeeing Judas ſo like in every reſpect to Je- " ſus, laid hands upon him, &c."

Chap. ccxviii.

In which is related the paſſion of Judas the traitor.

" The ſoldiers afterwards took Judas, and " bound him, notwithſtanding he ſaid with " truth to them that he was not Jeſus. And " the ſoldiers mocked him, ſaying, Sir, do " not be afraid: for we are come to make " thee King of Iſrael; and we have bound " thee, becauſe we know thou haſt refuſed the " kingdom. And Judas ſaid, Ye have loſt " your ſenſes. I came to ſhew you Jeſus, " that ye might take him; and ye have bound

" me, who am your guide. The ſoldiers loſt
" their patience, hearing this, and they began
" to go with him, ſtriking and buffeting him,
" till they reached Jeruſalem," &c. &c.

Chap. ccxix.

" They carried him to Mount Calvary,
" where they executed criminals, and cruci-
" fied him, ſtripping him naked for the greater
" ignominy. Then he did nothing but cry
" out, O my God, why haſt thou forſaken
" me, that I ſhould die unjuſtly, when the
" real malefactor hath eſcaped?

" *I ſay in truth* that he was ſo like in per-*
" *ſon, figure, and geſture to Jeſus, that as many*
" *as knew him, believed firmly that it was he,*
" *except Peter:* for which reaſon many left
" his doctrine, believing that it had been
" falſe; as he ſaid that he ſhould not die till
" the end of the world. But thoſe who ſtood
" firm, were oppreſſed with grief, ſeeing him
" die whom they underſtood to be Jeſus: not
" recollecting what he had told them. And
" in company with his mother, they were pre-
" ſent at his death, weeping continually. And
" by means of Joſeph Abarimatheas†, they

* What is here printed in Italics, is written in the MS. in red characters.

† It is thus written in the MS.

"obtained from the preſident the body of "Judas. And they took him down from the "croſs, burying him with much lamentation "in the new ſepulchre of Joſeph; having "wrapped him up in linen and precious oint-"ments."

Chap. ccxx.

"They all returned, each man to his houſe: "and he who writeth, with James and John, "went with the mother of Jeſus to Naza-"reth. And the diſciples who did not fear "God with truth, went by night and ſtole "the body of Judas and hid it; ſpreading a "report that he [i. e. Jeſus] had riſen again, "from whence ſprung great confuſion among "the people. And the high-prieſt com-"manded under pain of Anathema, that no "one ſhould talk of him; and on this ac-"count raiſed a great perſecution, baniſhing "ſome, tormenting others, and even ſtoning "ſome to death: becauſe it was not in the "power of any one to be ſilent on this ſub-"ject. And then came news to Nazareth, "that Jeſus had riſen again. And he that "writeth, deſired the mother of Jeſus to "leave off her lamentation. And Mary ſaid, "Let us go to Jeruſalem, to ſee if it is truth. "If I ſee him, I ſhall die content."

Chap.

Chap. ccxxi.

" The Virgin returned to Jeruſalem with " him that writeth, and James and John, " the ſame day that the decree of the high- " prieſt came out. And as ſhe feared God, " though ſhe knew the command was unjuſt, " ſhe entreated thoſe who talked with her, " not to ſpeak of her Son. Who can " ſay, how we were then affected? God, " who knows the heart of man, knows that " between the grief for the death of Ju- " das, whom we underſtood to be Jeſus, and " the pleaſure of ſeeing him riſen again, " we almoſt expired. And the angels who " were the guardians of Mary went up to " heaven the third day, and told Jeſus what " was paſſing. And he, moved with com- " paſſion for his mother, entreated of God " that he might be ſeen by his diſciples. " And the compaſſionate God ordered his " four favourite angels to place him within " his own houſe, and to guard him three days: " that they, and they only might ſee him, " who believed in his doctrine. Jeſus deſ- " cended, ſurrounded with light, into the " houſe of his mother: where were the two " ſiſters,

" ſiſters, Martha and Mary, and Lazarus,
" and he that writeth, and John and James,
" and Peter. And when they ſaw him, they
" fell with their faces on the earth, as if dead.
" And Jeſus lifted them up; ſaying, Fear
" not, for I am your Maſter. Lament not
" from henceforth, for I am alive. They
" were aſtoniſhed at ſeeing Jeſus, becauſe
" they thought him dead. And Mary weep-
" ing ſaid, Tell me, my Son, why, if God
" gave thee power to raiſe up the dead, did
" he conſent that thou ſhouldeſt die, with
" ſo much reproach and ſhame to thy rela-
" tions and friends, and ſo much hurt to thy
" doctrine, leaving us all in deſolation? Je-
" ſus replied, embracing his mother, Believe
" me, for I tell thee the truth, I have not
" been dead: for God has reſerved me for
" the end of the world. In ſaying this he
" deſired the Angels to manifeſt themſelves,
" and to tell how he had paſſed through every
" thing. At the inſtant they appeared, like
" four ſuns: and all preſent proſtrated them-
" ſelves on the ground, overcome by the pre-
" ſence of the Angels. And Jeſus gave to
" all of them ſomething to cover themſelves
" with; that they might be able to hear the
" Angels ſpeak. And Jeſus ſaid to his mo-
" ther,

"ther, Theſe are the Miniſters of God. Ga-
"briel knows his ſecrets; Michael fights
"with his enemies; Aſrafiel will cite all to
"judgment; and Azrael receives the ſouls.
"And the holy Angels told, how they had
"by the command of God, taken up Jeſus,
"and transformed Judas, that he might ſuf-
"fer the puniſhment which he wiſhed to bring
"on Jeſus. And he that writeth, ſaid, Is
"it lawful for me to aſk of thee, in the ſame
"manner as when thou waſt in the world?
"And Jeſus anſwered, Speak, Barnabas,
"what thou wiſheſt. And he ſaid, I wiſh
"that thou wouldeſt tell me, how God, be-
"ing ſo compaſſionate, could afflict us ſo
"much, in giving us to underſtand that thou
"waſt he that ſuffered, for we have been
"very near dying? And thou being a pro-
"phet, why did he ſuffer thee to fall under
"diſgrace, by [apparently] placing thee on
"a croſs, and between two robbers? Jeſus
"anſwered, Believe me, Barnabas, let the
"fault be ever ſo ſmall, God chaſtiſeth it
"with much puniſhment. And as my mo-
"ther and faithful diſciples loved me with a
"little earthly love, God chaſtiſed that love
"by this grief: that he might not chaſtiſe
"it in the other world. And though I was
"inno-

" innocent, yet as they called me God, and " his Son; that the Devils might not mock " me on the day of judgment, he has choſen " that I ſhould be mocked in this world. And " this mocking ſhall laſt till the holy meſſen- " ger of God † ſhall come, who ſhall unde- " ceive all believers. And then he ſaid, Juſt " art thou O God! and to thee only belong- " eth the honour and glory, with worſhip, " for ever.

Chap. ccxxii, and the laſt.

" And then he ſaid, See Barnabas that thou " by all means write my Goſpel, relating " every thing which has happened in the " world concerning me; and let it be done " exactly: in order that the faithful may be " undeceived, knowing the truth. He that " writeth, ſaid, Maſter I will do it as thou " commandeſt me, God willing: but I did " not ſee all that happened with Judas. Je- " ſus anſwered, Here ſtand Peter and John " who ſaw it, and who will relate it to thee. " And he told James and John to call the " ſeven Apoſtles who were abſent, and Ni- " codemus, and Joſeph Abarimatheas, and " ſome of the 72 diſciples. When they were

† i. e. Mahomet.

" come,

" come, they did eat with him; and on the
" third day he commanded them all to go to
" the Mount of Olives with his mother: be-
" cauſe he was to return to heaven. All the
" apoſtles and diſciples wept, except 25 of
" the 72, who had fled to Damaſcus, with fear.
" And exactly at mid-day, while they were
" all in prayer, Jeſus came with many An-
" gels (bleſſing God) with ſo much bright-
" neſs that they all bent their faces to the
" ground. And Jeſus raiſed them up, ſay-
" ing, Fear not your Maſter, who comes to
" take leave of you, and to recommend you
" to God our Lord, by the mercies received
" from his bounty: and be He with you!
" And upon this he diſappeared with the An-
" gels; all of us remaining amazed at the
" great brightneſs in which he left us."

P. 385. *Ye ſhall know them by their fruits.*] There are various teſts of moral truth: and the excellency of a religion may be judged of under diſtinct lights, all of which are calculated to give reciprocal ſtrength and evidence to each other; though doubtleſs ſome are better adapted than others to afford conviction to the generality of enquiries. Few minds are qualified for abſtract ſpeculation; and fewer ſtill are ſatisfied with the conclu-

ſions which reſult from a train of reaſoning that is built on it.

But of that evidence which ariſes from facts moſt perſons are capable of judging: and as the Chriſtian religion is deſigned for univerſal benefit, the wiſdom of providence has adapted its proofs to the object it had in view; and rendered them clear and open to the ſenſes, in order that they might carry more certain conviction to the underſtanding.

Miracles were open teſtimonies of a divine interpoſition; and gave a ſanction to the doctrines, and an authority to the precepts, in defence of which they were profeſſedly wrought.

The perſonal character of our bleſſed Lord, and the various parts of his conduct, both in the more retired and the more public ſcenes of life, afford a ſtrong evidence for the truth of that cauſe which he both lived and died to promote; nor are the characters and conduct of his apoſtles deſtitute of the ſame evidence: for animated by the ſpirit of their divine maſter, they followed his example; and the conſtancy with which they vindicated his religion amidſt the ſharpeſt perſecutions, and the chearfulneſs with which they ſubmitted to death in order to give their laſt

ſeal

ſal to its truth, would not fail of leaving a very deep impreſſion on the minds of ſober and impartial obſervers. The aſtoniſhing triumph of Chriſtianity over the ſuperſtition, idolatry, and wickedneſs of the world; over all that philoſophy could contrive, and all that power could accompliſh, carried with it a viſible token of an Almighty hand: and the effects produced by it on individuals and ſocieties rendered the interpoſition of that hand ſtill more illuſtrious.

The blameleſſneſs and purity of character, for which the primitive Chriſtians were ſo much diſtinguiſhed, have been acknowledged even by their enemies. Pliny, who was by no means diſpoſed to treat them with much lenity, or their cauſe with much reſpect, confeſſes that the moſt rigid ſcrutiny into their conduct, turned out in every view favourable to the innocence and chaſtity of their morals. It is indeed very remarkable, that the account he gives of the Chriſtians was ſuch as he had received, not from their friends and adherents (whoſe report of their religion might be liable to the ſuſpicion of partiality) but from perſons the leaſt of all men inclined to ſacrifice truth in order to ſave the credit of

Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity and its profeſſors. He received the account from perſons who had been Chriſtians, but who either from fear or intereſt, or ſome other motive unknown but to the judge of all, had apoſtatized from the church, and relapſed into idolatry. Such were the perſons who affirmed (and Pliny does not appear to diſbelieve their teſtimony), that the higheſt fault with which the Chriſtians were juſtly chargeable, was their aſſembling on a ſtated day before ſun-riſing and ſinging a hymn to Chriſt, as to a Deity:—in binding themſelves by a ſacrament to avoid every kind of wickedneſs, particularly fraud, robbery, and adultery:—not to violate their word, or refuſe to yield up whatever had been entruſted in their hands, when it ſhould be demanded: and that it was their cuſtom to depart and afterwards to meet again at an innocent meal, where all partook in common of the entertainment that was provided*.

The ancient apologiſts conſtantly challenged their enemies to produce any accuſations againſt them which tended to impeach their morals: and appealed to their conduct, as an evidence in their favour, with a confidence which nothing but conſcious uprightneſs could

* Lib. x. Epiſt. 97.

have

have inſpired. Inſtead of ſhrinking from the ſevereſt trial that jealouſy itſelf could make, they invited their adverſaries to meet them upon a ground, where the merits of the queſtion could be aſcertained moſt exactly; where ſucceſs was to be moſt honourable, and defeat moſt ignominious.

Their meekneſs and forbearance amidſt the moſt injurious treatment; and their patience and perſeverance amidſt the moſt threatning dangers, were objects of admiration even to their perſecutors. But their benevolence was as amiable as their zeal was ardent: and while truth gave them courage to brave diſtreſs and death, compaſſion ſoftened their hearts when they beheld the miſeries of others; and the tendereſt ſympathy was united with the moſt inflexible integrity.

Euſebius has preſerved in his Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory*, a very memorable fragment of an epiſtle of Dionyſius the Biſhop of Alexandria, who flouriſhed at the time when the empire under Gallienus was diſtracted by internal diviſions, ariſing from the interfering intereſts of contending and jealous competitors for power; and when the calamities of war were doubled by the more dreadful viſitation of

* Lib. vii. cap. 22.

plagues, and famine, and earthquakes. At a criſis ſo trying as this the Chriſtian religion had an opportunity of ſhewing its ſuperior influence, by the exemplary conduct of its profeſſors. Their reſignation to God, and their unwearied benevolence towards the diſtreſſed, exerted at the hazard of their own lives, and manifeſted by the moſt endearing attentions that the tendereſt compaſſion could dictate, are deſcribed in this Epiſtle in a manner ſo ſtriking and pathetic, as neceſſarily to impreſs the mind with a deep ſenſe of the power of that religion which nouriſhes the gentler qualities of the human heart, and ſooths its more amiable feelings at the time that it arms the breaſt with a more than common fortitude, and enables the Chriſtian to *ſtand in the evil day, and endure hardſhip as a good ſoldier of Jeſus Chriſt.* The venerable father at the ſame time remarks the different behaviour of the heathen. They abandoned their deareſt friends the moment that calamities overtook them; and ſeeking their own ſafety, left the wretched to periſh without relief.

Bardeſanes, the celebrated Syrian Heretic, obſerved in his day, that Chriſtianity in a moral and civil view had been wonderfully beneficial: for that Chriſtians of all countries

had retained the good qualities and rejected the reigning vices of the ſeveral nations of which they were natives. "In Parthia (ſays "he), the Chriſtians, though Parthians, are "not polygamiſts: nor in Perſia, though "Perſians, do they marry their own daugh-"ters. In Bactria and Gaul they do not vio-"late the marriage bed: and wherever they "reſide, they reſiſt the influence of corrupt "laws and wicked cuſtoms*."

P. 395. l. 22. *In the Eaſt, under the influence of Mahometan belief, the human mind appears to have loſt ſomewhat of its capacity and power.*] To this torpid inactivity nothing perhaps has more effectually contributed than the doctrine of Fate, which, as it is adopted in the creed of the Muſſulman†, is not only derogatory from the dignity of human nature, but plainly hoſtile to the intereſts and duties of ſocial life. It renders the reaſon of man uſeleſs, by deſtroying his free agency; it reſtrains and diſcourages induſtry, checks the flights of genius, and in the place of that active and perſevering vigour, which can alone prevent or remedy misfortune, ſubſtitutes a paſſiveneſs without piety, and a deſpondence without reſignation. Taught by his

* Jortin's Remarks, vol. i. p. 357. edit 17[illegible]7.

† Koran, chap. xvi.

prophet that every human event is irrevocably pre-ordained by the Deity, and that, not the time only, but even the manner and circumſtances of his death have been unalterably fixed from all eternity, the ſuperſtitious Muſſulman deems every attempt to change the common order of things a crime not far removed from rebellion againſt the eſtabliſhed laws of God. Hence he beholds his parents, his children, and his friends falling a ſacrifice to diſeaſe and death, with a ſtupid and ineffectual concern. Hence he views the peſtilence ravaging his country, *and deſtroying thouſands and ten thouſands in his ſtreets*, without exerting one ſingle effort to check its baneful progreſs. The arts by which more enlightened nations have been enabled to repel, or at leaſt to mitigate its rage; arts which nature, philoſophy, and religion unite to recommend, are regarded by the diſciple of the Arabian prophet as impious and profane. Blindly and obſtinately attached to the principle of abſolute and unqualified predeſtination, he ſits in a ſtate of torpid inſenſibility, till the Almighty arreſts the hand of the deſtroying Angel, and ſuſpends for a period the work of death and deſolation.

P. 430.

P. 430. l. 19. *Yet Chriſtianity far ſurpaſſes every other religion in its viſible tendency to make us better men, and in its real effects upon the ſentiments and the manners of mankind.*] Even from the teſtimony of Mr. GIBBON, if we attend to his facts, without aſſenting implicitly to his opinions, it appears, that Chriſtianity had in ſome degree contributed to the moral improvement of that empire, which under the inauſpicious influence of Paganiſm had been plunged in the fouleſt immoralities. Frailties, abſurdities, and crimes are to be found in thoſe who wielded the ſceptre after the eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity; but the catalogue is not ſo numerous, or ſo black and portentous, as that which preſents itſelf to the diſpaſſionate enquirer, in the preceding ages. We are not ſhocked with the cold and deliberate inhumanity of a Tiberius, with the outrageous debaucheries, and frantic cruelties of a Nero, with the groſs ſenſualities of a Vitellius, with the diſguſting puerilities and odious barbarities of a Domitian.

But we may be told, that after the introduction of the Goſpel, this ſtupendous empire fell into ruin. Be it ſo. But was not the ſuperſtructure itſelf much defaced, and were not the very foundations looſened, long before,

before, under the diſſolute manners of the people, the turbulent ſpirit of the Prætorian bands, the profligate ſervility of the Pagan ſenate, and the enormous oppreſſions of Pagan emperors?

Is extenſive empire, we may aſk the objectors, a bleſſing to the general intereſts of ſociety? Did the Roman empire, founded as it was upon the violence of conqueſt, and ſupported by all the arts of corruption and all the rigours of deſpotiſm, give riſe to ſuch a political or a moral condition of the world, that any mind enlightened by philoſophy and ſoftened by benevolence, could ſeriouſly wiſh for its continuance?

To arm the hands of conquerors, or to glut the ambition of kings, made no part of that Teacher's deſign, whoſe kingdom was not of this world. It is therefore no ſolid objection to his religion, that it did not promote thoſe ſecular intereſts, with which both the founder, and the immediate ſupporters of its pretenſions diſclaimed even the ſlighteſt connection. But the Goſpel, be it remembered, even amidſt the convulſions and diſtractions of the Roman empire, gradually infuſed juſter notions of virtue and piety into the boſoms of individuals. It tamed the ſavage ſpirits, and

enlightened

enlightened the underſtandings, of the barbarians who reduced the ſcattered provinces to ſubjection, and at laſt puſhed their arms to the enfeebled and unreſiſting Capital. And let it not be forgotten, that from the ſubverſion of this empire aroſe all the improvements in arts, in ſcience, in civilization, and in government, which are now eſtabliſhed in Chriſtian countries, and to which Chriſtianity itſelf was indirectly inſtrumental. The Goſpel, before the fall of this empire, firſt ſpread its influence in private life, and then it put a partial check on the crimes of thoſe who acted on the great theatre of public life. If the fall of the Roman empire was, upon the whole, an evil, Chriſtianity was not the ſole, or the obvious cauſe of that evil. If it was eventually a good, we are indebted for a ſhare of that good to the juſt notions of their duty, which the Goſpel had implanted in the minds of its profeſſors, and to the powerful motives by which it encouraged them in the proſecution of their true happineſs.

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